

Unfathomable 91

Chapter 91

Back in the jungle area, the party of four changed to five after they came across a granny hiding in a hollowed-out tree stump. As they were walking next to the stump, she had noticed her Matriarch amongst the group which prompted her to peek her head out. This almost caused Huo Qiang to punch her as the granny's face was similar looking to a goblin female.

"Wait it's me Feng Maling! Stay your hand!"

The grandma shouted out while still being stuck in her hiding place, she wouldn't be able to dodge the incoming punch if Qiang went through with it. Luckily the man jumped back, looking to Feng Liena with question marks hovering above his head.

"Ohoho, you were fine grandma?"

Feng Liena acted a bit surprised that the elderly woman made it out alive in one piece, mostly due to the old woman having a cultivation base in the core formation middle stage. The woman was good at hiding though, even Zhang Dong didn't pick her up with his enhanced senses.

Matt squinted with his eyes as he looked at the old woman, she had really wrinkled up brown skin, which looked like the type of color you got from overusing spray-on tan. She wasn't very good looking and the smudged mascara that made her look like she was crying didn't help either. He had the urge to dump some water on the woman's face and rub that mascara off but held it in.

"Why wouldn't I be alive!"

The granny managed to escape the tree stump, on which her butt got stuck after trying to squeeze out. She rolled forward and quite smoothly landed on her two feet. Matt wanted to hold up a '10' number and clap his hands, the old lady seemed to be quite nimble even for her advanced age.

Feng Liena shrugged and stuck her tongue out at her clan member, the elderly woman shook her cane at the busty Matriarch. The cane and robe that the woman was wearing, made her look like some occult wizard. Matt didn't say anything just yet, as he just looked at the two women bickering. He wasn't sure what kind of relationship the two had, but it made them look like close family by the way they were interacting with each other.

After a moment of some back and forth between the two, the woman gave out a cough and looked at the cultivators around them.

"Little Liena, I see you are traveling with the Hou clan young master... and this is..."

Feng Liena immediately jumped in, moving closer to Matt and patting him on the shoulder.

"This is little Dong, my little brother!"

Gloom filled Matt's face at the mention of his 'little' title. He thought that the granny would talk some sense into the strange Matriarch but the woman just squinted at him, her hand moving to her cane as she got closer.

“Are you sure... he...?”

Feng Liena just stuck out her overdeveloped chest and did a sideways peace sign over her eye, then stuck out her tongue in a strange pose that Matt only remembered some manga or anime characters doing back in his earth days.

“The Zhang Patriarch... could you give me a moment with the Matriarch...”

The old lady asked while the three men looked at the Feng clan members with strange expressions. Matt watched as the two moved away from the group and behind some trees, he had question signs in his eyes not knowing what this was about. He sat down on the tree stump that the old lady popped out from and strained his ears, trying to listen in on the conversation the two women were having.

“... yes, it was just like in the ancient texts...”

He could hear the two talking, it was mostly the young lady saying something about some old scriptures.

“Oh? so he carried you like in the writings of the great ancestor? “

“Yes, yes... he even...”

Matt continued eavesdropping as Feng Liena recounted their first meeting, but he had no idea what these old ‘texts’ or this ‘great ancestor’ was. Supposedly his rescue was something that those texts were describing, or prophesizing but when he tried to listen in some more as he tried to figure the situation out a booming voice next to his ear almost made him fall down from his seat.

“Hey brother, I think we shouldn’t stay here too long.”

The voice belonged to his new self proclaimed brother Huo Qiang, the young master had apparently taken a liking to Matt after the rescue party. After some bonding time which consisted of constant battles against various fantasy-like monsters, he started calling him brother. He even offered one of his younger siblings as a concubine to bring their clans together, though his gyaru sis didn’t take to that offer kindly and he had to pull the two parties apart again.

“Ah... sure, after they are finished talking let’s move out.”

Matt rubbed his neck slightly before standing up, he gave up on the idea of listening in to the conversation now as it seemed to be over. The two women returned, Feng Liena beaming with a smile while the lady looked at Zhang Dong with a mixed expression.

“If it is so... I approve.”

Feng Maling cupped her hands and gave a bow to Zhang Dong, the man not really knowing what this was about along with the ‘approving’ part.

‘What are these two talking about... am I missing something here?’

The two apparently came to some kind of conclusion during their conversation, something probably related to those ancient texts. He didn’t really feel like those things were important at the moment, as there were still some people missing. From the ten core formation elders, five were here and one was

dead. This wasn't as bad as it looked, but considering that if he didn't arrive to save them they would probably be all dead by this point, besides the granny that knew how to hide.

They all headed out, the granny was the weakest member from the group and was more a backline attacker compared to the men in the party. They decided to keep the two ladies in the back along with mutton chops elder, that Matt forgot the actual name of and was embarrassed to ask about again.

Soon enough they spotted another casualty of the secret ground they were in. It was a mangled up corpse of an unknown cultivator, which left them with three more potential survivors. They decided to rest up for the time being, no one was sure how long they were here anymore the day and night cycles kept changing. Matt managed to shoo his big sis away, for the time being, telling her that she should take care of her grandma while he cultivates for some time.

She gave him a cute pout, then repeated the same motion she did the first time he saw her on the flying ship and stormed out. He gave out a sigh and squatted down on the floor, there were a couple of machetes and axes scattered around all in various grades of the earth grade. He was slowly absorbing the scattered monster weapons from the hunted beasts, he found them to be slightly less potent for the progression of his body refining skill than the ones he was able to make himself of the same grading.

'Maybe it has something to do with how they are made... I get fewer points for slaying these monsters as well.'

His progress was slow but he was at about thirty percent now, soon enough his body art would pass his regular cultivation. The time required to advance his regular cultivation technique was just too much, so this was the fastest way to get results. His body was giving off a golden sheen, it illuminated the cave that he was sitting in the people outside could feel their 'team leader' cultivating inside getting goosebumps from the strange energy fluctuations the part of the cave he was in was giving off.

Back outside Feng Liena exited the cave passage that Matt was cultivating in and headed into a different section. They had found this monster dwelling not long ago and decided to settle in for the night after clearing out the creatures inside. The busty woman walked to a separate cave room, that the granny was sitting in a lotus position. She gave out a sigh and sat not so far away from her clan member.

"Were the texts wrong... I don't think he is willing..."

The old lady opened up her eyes and replied while still sitting in her cultivation pose.

"You must not doubt the teachings of our great ancestor young Matriarch."

Feng Maling was skeptical at first, but after seeing Zhang Dong's high cultivation and how he just bulldozed through monsters that she would have trouble fighting one one one, she believed that he would be a fitting partner for this young Matriarch.

"The teachings are clear, maybe you must create a new starting point as the text proclaimed"

The baked potato announced in a wise tone and shut her eyes as she tried to rest up, her Matriarch thought about a couple of things and came to some kind of conclusion before departing, her face showing an odd determination that didn't fit her current character.

"Yes, I will create a new opportunity!"

After a couple of hours, Matt was done with absorbing the weapons. His golden skin glistened even more and he was sure that he would be able to reach the great circle soon. He hopped back to his feet and stretched out, he was a bit sweaty so he decided to wash up by the spring, which was nearby the cave they were staying in.

While he was walking through the cave corridors he felt a life signal close by, it seemed to be Feng Liena by the Qi imprint. He wasn't sure what she was up to, but she was clinging to the wall waiting for something.

'Is she waiting for me? Guess I'll act surprised?'

He was bare-chested at the moment, so he put his robes back on even though he was still sweaty. He whistled a bit to himself as he approached the corridor in which his favorite big sis was waiting for him, wondering what this was about. At the exact moment that he peeked out from around the corner, the girl came rushing at him.

She had a very cutesy way of running at this moment. Her arms were pushing into her chest, with her forearms to the side. She was waiving them around with her feet shuffling forward at an amazing pace, this made her chest bounce quite a bit, thus successfully making Matt focus his attention at the display. She was holding a piece of flattened fruit in her mouth for some reason and running right at him.

"Oh no, I will be late...Kyaaaa"

She bumped into the large bewildered man in front of her, she bounced off of him and landed on the ground with the piece of fruit flying out of her mouth. Then she just sat there, her legs bent a bit so he kind of could see the part between them. Still, there was some cloth covering the important parts, this made him swallow hard before shaking his head and finally reacting.

"Uhh...Are you alright?"

He wasn't sure what to do as he kind of instinctively reached out to help her off the ground while trying not to look at her undies. Feng Liena blushed hard as she grasped his hands back, Matt could have sworn that he saw stars in her eyes the moment he reached his hand out to her.

"Oh silly me, I didn't see you there~"

She stood up from the ground and dusted her posterior off, but before he could ask more questions she said that she was in a hurry and had to go. The man just rubbed his head and shrugged, leaving afterward to get himself cleaned in the nearby spring. While he was out, his elder sister was contemplating her next move as this was just the beginning...

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Matt noticed that his 'sis' was acting even weirder than usual. She kept insisting that he eat some of the food that she made, though by the looks of it it just looked like some nuts and berries she found in the forest. She even tried feeding some of those berries to him, treating him like a baby.

"Say Ahhhhhh~"

Matt evaded the feeding attempt, the woman was holding some sticks that were used as chopsticks. He started seeing a pattern in this woman's actions soon enough.

'It's as if...'

She bumped into him with some food in her mouth, she tried feeding him some homemade food, she kept falling down while trying to act all cute for some reason...

'Aren't those just bad romance manga tropes... are those the secret texts ...'

The gears in his brain started turning, this would explain why the clan women all looked like Japanese gyarus. Maybe the old 'ancestor' was someone that actually lived there, maybe due to the total worship these cultivator nuts have for their ancestors they decided to copy her looks.

'Well saving a girl from bad guys is a popular trope in novels... those two did say that the way I carried her was important too...'

He wasn't sure what this woman wanted from him before, but now he had the reason to believe that it had something to do with romance. The things she did and the way she acted sounded like stuff a manga protagonist would do, the going to school and the two leads bumping into each other was a really old one at that.

'Why do these people have to take everything at face value...'

He wasn't sure how this female clan ended up with this mindset exactly, did their 'ancestor' play some kind of prank on them, or was it some kind of weeaboo nut instead. The woman even tried luring him into peeking at her when she was taking a bath, though he didn't take the bait and just evaded that flag the other day. He started getting worried, would she move on to worse tropes, like those bipolar ones and he would end up getting assaulted whenever he glanced at the girl's cleavage.

'I need to nip this in the bud otherwise, she might end up stalking me later on... or even turning into one of those murder heroines that stab people for looking at her love target...'

He wasn't sure how he should go about this, how do you explain to a cultivator bimbo that the thing she is doing is total hogwash? Would they be seriously offended if he told them that their ancestor was an idiot? Or that they just found her manga stash and interpreted it wrongly... maybe he could go with that angle.

'Ugh... I still hate talking to people...'

He groaned and palmed his face, contemplating on the bs that he should tell these two Feng clan members, would probably talk to the two at once otherwise they might talk themselves into some nonsense later when he isn't around. He found the two going through some large leaves, the elderly lady was pushing vines through it, it made the large leaf look like a green apron. The younger girl with the healthy tan was looking at some coconuts, Matt didn't really know where she got those from or what she needed them for either.

Matt loudly caught into his hand to get the two ladies attention.

"Could I have a word with you two, it's about your Ancestor and those ancient texts..."

The two women looked at each other, their brows furrowing as they stopped doing their preparations. The two just nodded at Zhang Dong and followed them into the cave, somewhere where the two Huo

clan members couldn't hear them. The two then looked at the white-haired cultivator, that was standing to them with his back and looking slightly upwards, his hand resting on his chin.

"I overheard your previous conversation about your ancestor, Firstly, I have to apologize for eavesdropping on you two. Secondly, I think you are interpreting the teachings of the senior wrongly..."

He didn't want to talk while facing the two for two reasons, one he looked more mysterious that way and two he was bad at keeping eye contact and he might break character if they stared him down too much. The tranquil will technique didn't do much for his sweaty palms. First to speak out was the granny, giving off a somewhat grumpy and annoyed tone.

"You dare? How did our Feng clan wrongly interpret the teachings of old, the old texts have been passed down through generations, they have been throughout studied by the previous Matriarchs, are you saying that they were all wrong? Do you even know what the old texts are?"

The granny started getting quite angry, this man was saying that the old seniors were wrong. That they somehow translated the texts wrongly. She wasn't even sure if this man knew what the secret texts were, there was nothing like it in this world so she was skeptical of his knowledge, but then he spoke up.

"You might refer to the ancient texts as texts... but in reality, they are mostly drawings... with the writing portion placed in white bubbles of sorts... aren't they?"

The Zhang Clan Patriarch cut her off

The woman stopped, Feng Liena also looked curious. The ancient writings were in manga form, this form of art was something foreign in this kind of world setting, thus the two women were quite surprised as the man talked even more.

"Is it mostly about young teenage girls and boys, the girls wearing short skirts, everyone wearing a uniform and they seem to go to some kind of place of teaching where they spend time in a group between twenty and thirty, everyone having a desk..."

Matt wasn't doing much besides describing the usual high school setting that most of those manga's had. The uniforms varied but the school remained the same, there would always be some recurring things that he could mention while keeping the rest vaguer as he had no idea about the core characters in this story, but he was sure that the female lead was a gyaru.

"How could you know that... did you sneak into our clan and steal out secret writings!?"

The woman's eyes were turning bloodshot, even Feng Liena was looking strangely at Matt that didn't like where this was going.

"Nothing of the sorts, I've just come across similar secret writings in my travels, so I just thought I could offer you some insight into your own."

The two women looked at each other, Feng Liena nodded and replied in an uncharacteristic mild tone.

"Please continue."

Matt swallowed hard as this would be the point in which he had to explain everything to them.

"I also came in contact with similar secret writings, in it, there was a certain youth he was carrying a strange rectangle bag in his hand and rushing to the stated place where he was taught by his elders..."

"I wondered why the ancient elders created it, was there some kind of secret technique buried in the teachings? I wondered and then also tried following the instructions, but then I realized that it was mistaken!"

He grasped his fist tightly, looking at it for more dramatic effect.

"The seniors didn't want me to follow the secret texts literally, it was all a test! In reality, they wanted me to follow my own path. Pave it with my own two hands and awaken the greater Dao that slumbered in me..."

He moved his hands apart, the greater Dao of lightning radiating from his being as the two women gasped.

"So you see, I think your ancestor wanted someone from your clan to create their own way. Following into the footsteps of your seniors is a noble cause, but only when you follow your own Dao the real path will lay in front of you."

He wasn't sure what he was rumbling about, but the two women had strange solemn expressions on their faces. Was it working? He wasn't sure, but he at least hoped that Feng Liena would stop bothering him with her silly antics.

"Well, this is all that I wanted to discuss, maybe if you pave your own path you might awaken the greater Dao of wind, instead of using those derived techniques that you are cultivating at the moment..."

He quickly left the room, leaving them with some vague explanations hoping for the best, well at least it couldn't get any worse than this, right? Feng Liena stopped interfering with his affairs after that, mostly hanging out in the back with a complex expression on her face.

Later that day Matt relaxed and thought to himself about his surroundings and this secret ground. He had gotten used to life in this strange jungle, the monsters capped out at the late stage so he didn't have any problems with those. He was even able to defeat people of that level when he was at the middle stage mostly with ease. Time went by and they kept exploring, they even started drawing up a map on one large leaf so that they could keep track of the places they visited. They had to do this, as this place was highly disorienting and huge in scope.

Soon enough they came across the last survivors, though they wouldn't last for long as they were tightly bound up in spider webs. If it wasn't for Matt's aura detection capabilities he would probably think that the people inside those cocoons were already dead, but he could clearly feel life force radiating from them, though it was quite dim.

The young fire lord wanted to jump right in and trash those monsters, but due to the fiery nature of his attacks, they had to change plans. The webs were highly flammable, so one wrongly placed fire uppercut could incinerate the cultivators that were paralyzed in the spider webs. There were quite a few of those human-sized spiders up in the trees, the webs were spun all around them and one false move would alert those monsters.

Huo Qiang wasn't out of the loop though, it would be a waste to not use his skills that were clearly the bane of these spiders. They only needed to get the people out of there first. The plan was quite easy, the three men would distract the monster spiders first while the women snuck up to where the captives were.

It didn't take much to set off these creatures, as the moment they poked some of those webs and made some noises they appeared from the treetops. They were spitting venom at them, wiggling their spider legs in various directions as they came at the trio. Spiders always gave Matt the creeps, there was something deep down that made him fear that form even back on earth. This made him fight at a distance, firing off multiple Qi filled sword strikes that sliced and diced the large arachnids to pieces.

Zhang Dong didn't notice the looks the two men were giving him as they looked at his swordsmanship. The man himself got all of his skills thanks to the system so he didn't think anything of it but to the two the superb mastery of the art was mind-boggling. This man was about thirty years old and he had already mastered sword intent.

The system had a strange way of inserting the knowledge into his brain. It was as if an old pro boxer picking up some boxing gloves and throwing a couple of punches after years of rest. The knowledge and skill were there, but it took some time for all of it to come back to him. The techniques that he bought came with the required knowledge to perform them, the sword arts had a requirement of sword intent so after practicing for some time he naturally was able to use it.

This sword intent was the most basic one, but even then he would probably have some large sword sects trying to recruit him as a disciple if they knew that he was able to do that at such a young age. Matt knew that his fighting strength increased by quite a bit when he was wielding his sword, but he didn't really correlate it to the sword intent that let him chop up his enemies mostly in one clean cleave.

Soon granny baked potato sneaked up to where the cultivators were being held captive, she had quite a nifty technique to fade into the surroundings. Thanks to this she was able to cut up the web that the two were hanging from with the help of Feng Liena. They carried the two to safety while the men unleashed on the monsters. Huo Qiang unleashed his fiery wrath, setting everything ablaze around himself, the screams of the spider monsters could be heard almost instantly.

The spider webs were even more flammable than expected, thus the trees they were connected to them were quickly burning with them. The forest fire continued to burn, the spider creatures scattered escaping the flames the group of cultivators didn't give chase as the reason for the attack were the two wrapped up people.

After they brought them to a safer location they removed the white outer shell and saw two pale-looking men inside. Their veins were bulging out slightly from spots where the spiders injected venom into them. The elderly lady was handy for such occasions as she had extensive knowledge about healing. She found out that the two males were only paralyzed and should recover within the next 24 hours. The two were wearing a different kind of robe, making Matt think that they weren't from the same clan or party. Both of them looked to be in their late fifties with a cultivation level in the core formation middle stage.

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The two men regained their consciousness, they were indeed from two separate factions and one even mentioned that his clan brother had been slain by some other monsters not long ago. This brought the number of core formation elders up to seven, three had passed away in the jungle filled with game monsters.

The first man had a full beard and black hair, his stature was average the same as his height. His hair was all over the place, the days in the jungle weren't kind to this man as he looked a bit sickly probably some side effects from the spider venom. The second gentleman looked like a Shaolin monk. He had six dots on his forehead and a long white beard that went to about his navel, he was even wearing large round beads around his neck.

The first man's name was from a clan called the Kwok clan, and the baldy wasn't from a clan at all but instead from some kind of small Buddhist sect. It was quite a low-level sect, core formation cultivators were the strongest warriors that they possessed. The name of the sect was Tranquil Lotus Sect and it was also participating in this expedition to earn some resources and favor with the dark palm sect.

Matt's attention moved to the dark-haired elder though, he was grasping his hair tightly, eyes bulging out and red, his brows furrowed.

"Blasted Dark Palm Sect, they lied to us... we are doomed..."

He kept holding onto his head and trembling, he was seemingly in shock as he kept mumbling to himself and not really paying attention to the group that had rescued him. He was firmly slapped into shape by the Huo clan young master, that was getting annoyed by how he didn't even thank them for the rescue.

"What are you mumbling about you old fart, get a hold of yourself, what is this about the dark palm sect?"

The man looked up at the crimson-haired man, then at the other people that were staring at him as he let out an uncomfortable sounding laugh.

"Ah ha ha, don't you understand... they played us all... there will be no reward... there is no treasure, we will all die here..."

Everyone looked at him suspiciously, the man knew something that they didn't.

"Oh, why would you say such a thing?"

Matt chimed in moving closer, as he was afraid that his new brother would do something drastic to the man that lost his marbles. The man just looked at him and took out some kind of jade, it looked like some kind of more advanced communication jade but it was a bit cracked. He threw it on the ground and started talking, even without the other people having to ask.

"The Sect contacted us a couple of months ago, they mentioned this forsaken place and promised treasures and riches if we took this communication jade with us and reported what was in the secret ground to them."

"We didn't think much of it, we only thought that we would go in and leave. They must have blocked most of the information about this place, we just assumed the previous people were incompetent..."

The man slumped onto his knees, clearly not thinking that he could get out of this alive.

“But there hasn’t been any word from outside and these monsters just keep coming, they never stop.”

Matt placed his hand on the man’s shoulder thanks to his tranquil will he was able to somewhat calm other people down. The calming feeling washed over the nervous cultivator, that slowly started to calm himself down.

“Calm down, Everyone knows that we were probably sent here as some kind of experiment, but if we stay together we still stand a chance.”

Kwok Xun looked up at the man that had a strange positive outlook on things, he could feel that the cultivator was quite powerful, probably being in the great circle of core formation but he wasn’t quite sure. He wanted to believe him, but after having spend weeks running away and battling strange monsters he was just tired.

“You should listen to brother Dong, but we can also just leave you here if you are going to be a hindrance.”

Huo Qiang chimed in, Matt’s brows furrowing as he started threatening the dude that had PTSD. Though it showed some effects as after calming down, the man went red in the face with rage and jumped up.

“Me? a hindrance?”

He glared at the younger crimson-haired man, who was just grinning back not really caring one way or the other. In his opinion it would probably be better to just leave this guy here, why would they need someone that was a coward? Though when he looked at Zhang Dong, looking for approval he found the man staring daggers at him which made his smile turn upsidedown.

‘What are you doing you meat for brains, I even managed to calm him down and you riled him up again.’

“I’m sure you were through a lot, but so were all of us, before brother Dong came and rescued us all.”

Feng Liena moved in, she was carrying herself a bit differently than usual. Matt expected her to threaten the guy, or even try to give him a couple of smacks. Instead, she was quite calm, she was talking softly while keeping eye contact and with a gentle smile on her face. Was this her normal character when she dropped the female lead act? She also called him brother without the little part, which was a sign of progress.

While the tanned beauty was talking, he glanced to the baldy on the side. The man was remaining silent while sitting down, he was clearly in a cultivation position and by the Qi signature, he was trying to heal his wounds. When he noticed Matt’s gaze on him, he just nodded while clasping his hands, probably just his way of saying thank you.

Kwok Xun looked at the lady, then back to Huo Qiang who turned his face to the side, seemingly embarrassed when the woman mentioned that he was rescued by Zhang Dong as well. The man let out a long sigh before nodding and turning to Matt, he made a decision.

“Well, if you are willing I will accompany you.”

The man proclaimed while thinking that he didn’t have any other choice if he wanted to survive.

The group got reorganized, they had seven members now which meant that the overall battle strength had increased. Matt wasn't sure how to arrange the group this time around, but he decided to put the girls in the middle, the two new arrivals were in the back with mutton chops elder and he and Qiang were in the front.

They tracked along and finally, they spotted a change of scenery. There were two massive mountain ranges to the side, going straight up into the clouds. This mountain range formed a path of some sort as the path to the sides was blocked by them and the path forward was getting narrower with each step. It looked like the secret ground wanted them to move between these two mountains soon enough they figured out why.

There was a clearing, in that clearing stood a massive monster. It looked somewhat like a snake but it had two large legs protruding from the front part and the middle body part was a lot thicker than the rear tail part, it also had two serpent heads. They were a bit away from the thing that looked like the guardian of this area, behind it was a large gate embedded into bedrock.

"I bet the next area is past that gate... we either have to beat this monster or sneak past it?"

The group looked at the monster while thinking about possible ways of getting through. Matt didn't think sneaking was an option, the gate would probably only open after the monster was slain and busting through it would probably be more difficult than killing the boss that was guarding it.

Netherserpent [Core formation late stage]

'Hm, only in the late stage?'

Matt thought that a final boss would be stronger than the minibosses like the goblin chieftain he came upon in the jungle.

'Maybe the jungle part is harder than the actual boss?'

The thing was just standing there, probably waiting for trespassers to get into its domain. The party of cultivators was eager to move on, they spent many weeks in that godforsaken jungle and just wanted to get out of here. Matt couldn't really see any problems in attacking this monster as it didn't pose much of a threat so he decided to move forward along with the strongest members of his party to back him up.

Firing of range attacks was still not working out so the warriors had to get close and personal. The moment they got into what the monster deemed as its territory, it gave off a loud roar. It thumped with its two huge legs making the ground shake, but instead of running towards them it opened up that large snake-like mouth.

Everyone was a seasoned fighter so they knew what the monster was doing, part of them dodged to the left while some to the right as the breath attack was fired off by the green beast. One snakehead was breathing regular crimson fire, while the other was blue in hue turning the ground to ice the moment it connected.

"Can you get its attention?" Matt shouted out.

"Leave it to us, brother Dong!" Huo Qiang replied as he moved in closer towards one of the heads along with his retainer.

Feng Liena moved over to the other head with the other cultivators, pelting it with weakened ranged attacks the serpent head snapping angrily at them as they came closer.

It didn't take long for Zhang Dong to move closer, he waited for the monster to fire off its breath attack at his party members. Soon the time came, sword Qi formed around his longsword that gave out a humming noise as if it was resonating with his energies. Just as the left head closed its mouth, moving slightly upwards to charge its attack up he moved in. He stacked his condensation and avatar form onto each other for a speed and power boost, vanishing from everyone's sight for a fraction of a second and appearing behind the monster head that he was aiming at, the sword already having drawn blood.

The monster's head flew up into the air and flopped onto the ground, green blood gushing like a geyser from the stump. The monster's remaining head quickly looked at the giant wound, eyes all read as it looked at the person that delivered the blow. The man in question only looked at it, a smile on his face.

"Shouldn't you really be looking at me?"

The monster, of course, didn't reply as it was getting ready to burn the puny human with its fire breath but before it could do that it felt something coming from behind. When it turned around, it saw a fist clad in fire coming right for it the creature couldn't react and got sucker-punched right on the chin. It fell backward, its lower jaw popping out of the joint and just flopping against its elongated neck in a gruesome fashion.

Matt didn't really need to do much now, the other cultivators overwhelmed the monster with sheer numbers. It couldn't use its mouth anymore or use its breathing skill either. The serpent quickly turned into a punching bag, the ending came after Liena managed to decapitate the remaining head with the help of her battle fans.

The heads remained on the ground, the monster was slain and unmoving.

"Haha, there still might be hope."

Kwok Xun declared while giving one of the giant heads a kick. But Matt was still remaining vigilant, the large gate wasn't opening and he couldn't really tell if the monster was really dead. He should have delivered the last hit, then he would know when the system gave him a prompt but now he could only wait and see.

Suddenly he felt something and quickly shouted.

"No... get back!"

Kwok Xun turned to Zhang Dong who was charging towards him, not knowing why. But when he turned to the head that he just kicked he saw something bursting out from it. He didn't have enough time to react, only being able to watch as a metallic glint was swiping towards his neck. He then heard a sound of metal colliding with metal as Matt intercepted the attack that came for the cultivator's neck.

What was standing there was a human-sized snake man, holding two large sabers and locked in a battle of strength with Zhang Dong. The smaller monster somehow jumped out from the cut of head of the previous slain beast. The same happened with the other severed head, the two snake men were both giving off different auras, one of fire while the second of ice.

“I’ll handle this one, go help the others with the other one...”

Matt managed to push the creature back, he already noticed that it was a lot faster and more diverse with its attacks than the regular Netherserpent. Luckily the remaining body didn’t seem like it would be turning into more monsters. These two were just slightly stronger than the larger beast and the surprise tactic would only work once, the peculiar thing about these two creatures was that no matter how much they stabbed and maimed them they just wouldn’t die.

If they chopped off its head again, it would just grow back instantly. The wounds on its body regenerated at an astonishing pace, the cultivators were slowly losing their stamina and Qi during the prolonged fight.

‘Are these creatures immortal? How do we beat them?’

Then an idea popped into Matt’s head as he moved. He sliced off both of his hands and legs, slamming it down to the ground, his foot placed on the monster’s chest as he held it down on the ground.

“Hey, quickly cut off the head of the one you are fighting!”

Matt shouted at the other cultivators, that didn’t think cutting its head would do anything but the team leader was saying it so they had to try. The moment the decapitation happened, Matt sprung into action. He cleaved downwards on the thrashing monster that was regenerating its limbs, being sure to decapitate it at the same time as the others did the other beast.

Just as planned the moment the two heads rolled onto the ground, the monster’s bodies started shaking. There was no regeneration anymore, the fight was over as the bodies dissolved into nothingness leaving only the sabers behind.

“Finally...”

The large gates started creaking open and the cultivators could finally see what awaited them behind them. What it was, was a world filled with lava and a giant castle in the distance.

Chapter 94

The large gate-like door slammed itself open, the moment that happened you could feel the change in heat as the warm air started surging from the created opening. Matt didn’t receive any points for slaying one of the snake-men, maybe it was the system acting up or maybe the thing they were fighting wasn’t considered a normal beast.

“Hoh...”

Everyone’s mouths opened wide as they saw a narrow path in front of them, there was lava coming out from the sides and dropping down into what looked to be a giant lake below. The path in front of them went on for a while, bending a couple of times before you could see a giant castle-like structure in the distance. This time around, there was a clear path towards the next destination the lava was everywhere so they couldn’t really go anywhere besides forward.

Before they moved onwards Matt looked at the large sabers that the creatures dropped, they were quite high quality and there were four of them. Though he picked up the two that the monster he was fighting had on it, the other two were picked up by his companions. He was about half done into the

great circle with his body refining technique by now, these two weapons would probably add quite a bit. Even more, if he got four of them, but the items were already gaining new owners.

The mutton chop elder took one, while the other one got snatched by the new guy. He was thinking about getting them to cough those items up, but on second thought the new guy lost his weapon on the way and the Huo clan member earned his keep already. He would probably have a hard time beating the previous boss if he was alone, you have to share the loot some times, he thought to himself. He wanted to propose a short break so he could absorb the weapons, but the door started slowly closing itself.

“Damn... will those monsters revive or will this entrance be blocked for now...”

They had to make a decision, there could be other places like this that they could enter or they could be lost in the jungle for eternity. Matt didn't feel like he wanted to gamble on that so everyone rushed inside the lava chamber.

“I—it's' hot...”

Feng Liana aired her robe a bit, sweat running down her neck and making her cleavage glisten in the red light. Everyone felt that this place was really stuffy, the two Huo clan members weren't as uncomfortable as the rest though.

“Hah, this heat is nothing!”

Huo Qiang proclaimed as he strode inside with large strides. Matt's body refining skill was keeping him safe from the heat, but he wasn't sure about the rest.

“I think we shouldn't linger here, that castle over there isn't that far, let's go there just stay vigilant, we have no idea if more beasts are going to show up while we are crossing.”

They were in a disadvantageous position, the path was about ten meters wide but the drop-down was close to one kilometer. Even if they survived the drop, the burning hot lava would probably burn them to a crisp.

This was closed off space, the door slammed itself shut behind them soon after they entered. There was clearly a ceiling with many sharp stalactites coming out of it. The walls around them had openings throughout which lava was rushing down, filling up the flaming hot river below them that run on both sides of the bridge they were walking on.

They were about halfway through without anything coming out to bother them. The large castle started getting closer and they could now clearly see what it was. It was situated on an island surrounded by a lava lake, the path they were on was leading towards the gate. It was quite sharp looking with many pointy towers coming out from the structure with the middle one being the largest of them.

They weren't able to digest its looks as the moment they passed the halfway mark something started rumbling. They could feel the rocky bridge shaking below them, something was clearly wrong.

“Oh no, the bridge is collapsing”

Feng Maling shouted as she pointed behind them, in the distance from where they came from the bridge was collapsing. Sections of it just started crumbling and falling into the lava river below them.

Everyone started running with all their might, quickly going towards the ominous-looking structure on the island.

Matt looked back and could see one of the cultivators falling behind the others, it was the baked potato of a lady that was huffing and puffing, clearly running wasn't her strong suit. Being the gentleman that he was he stopped and backtracked, he grabbed the woman like a sack of potatoes over his shoulder and bolted for the fort in the distance now having to catch up to the rest of the cultivators.

"Ahh... Zhang Patriarch, you have my gratitude!"

"Don't talk or you might bite your tongue, I'm going to increase my speed..."

Matt replied while gathering spiritual energy in his legs, his feet made deep indents in the rocky ground as he pushed off with long strides quickly catching up to the remaining running cultivators with granny in tow. The whole place was shaking and crumbling, but everyone managed to make it the last one being the monk-like character whose sweaty head looked like a shiny marble.

"Sabbe satta dukkha pamuccantu..."

He took off his beads and started doing some chants, a holy aura surrounded his being as it washed away his anxiety. The people had unwillingly charged into the large castle-like structure, the gate was open but the bridge leading up to it had crumbled as the rest.

"At least this place isn't crumbling..."

Matt noted while he placed the granny that he was carrying back on the ground. The woman was blushing a little bit, but he couldn't really tell due to her dark complexion.

Feng Liena run-up to the two, her finger pointing up as if she wanted to say something but stopping mid-sentence.

"Ah... uh ... thank you for your help brother Dong, granny isn't the youngest anymore..."

He wasn't sure why the woman was having a hard time talking now, guess the previous conversation was showing some effects as she wasn't acting all hyperactive anymore. Matt just smiled at the woman and nodded.

"No problem, you can count on me!"

He replied while looking at the girl, she, in turn, covered her mouth and giggled a little bit.

"He he, brother Dong is really reliable."

The reply came with a cute smile, which made Matt stare slightly.

'What's with this comfortable atmosphere all of a sudden?'

He just nodded and tried steering the conversation away from himself and to the lair of potential monsters they were in. He couldn't feel any life signals for now, but a monster could just be summoned out of thin air here so they have to be wary of their surrounding.

“How about we check this place out, don’t stray too far away from the group though we don’t know if there are any more beasts here.”

Huo Qiang’s retainer chimed in while holding onto his new saber weapon. He looked like he was eager to chop someone up with that thing. There wasn’t much inside the structure, the area looked deserted. The structures around here looked old and shabby, there was dust everywhere and no sign of life anywhere. In the middle of the castle-fort stood a giant spire-like tower, there was a large door there with a peculiar familiar writing.

‘Those who enter here abandon all hope.’

The door had a palm drawn on it, probably something used to activate the opening mechanism so, for now, he told everyone to not go near it. This was also a tower structure, so there would probably be some levels with increasing difficulty.

“I think the next part is behind that door in the middle, I propose we rest and recover our Qi for now and then try opening it. We might not have time to do that later.”

Matt proposed, wanting to absorb those two weapons that he got and it was also good to take a breather for the other people. No one had anything against that, the cultivators already gave up the motion of working separately here there were just too many strange things around for one or two people to handle.

Everyone scattered to their own corner to prepare for the next battle, but before Matt could start absorbing those weapons the more friendly version of the Feng Matriarch came over to chat with him again.

“Could I have a moment~?”

She said in a cheery voice, Matt just stood up from his lotus position not really having a place to sit down comfortably for a chat so the two just stood there opposite each other.

“Sure, how can I help sister Liena”

Guess he could drop the big sis part and just go with how peers talked to each other in this world. They were both in a Patriarchal position in similar clans.

“Could we talk about the ancestral scriptures?”

Matt gulped a bit, not really wanting to talk about those as he wasn’t really sure how those people interpreted those manga panels like that.

“You see, the texts were incomplete but they were supposed to guide us on the path of Dao...”

Leliana asked while sitting on a more well-kept piece of the castle wall.

“Um, well the texts that I saw were similar to yours. It’s not like everything that’s in the secret scriptures is false, you just need to look into them on your own... and pick out the truths.”

Matt replied while trying not to show his sweaty palms, arms behind his back as he stood straight up hoping the woman would buy his response.

“Oh, truths...”

Liena looked to the distance, appearing like she was thinking about something for a moment, uncomfortable silence filling the surrounding which prompted Matt to speak up.

“F-for instance... your lovely darkened complexion, It’s a lot better than the pale one most female cultivators stand by... like you get a lot more vitamin D3 ... it’s good for your health and will progress your Dao further...”

Matt kind of trailed off at the end, his voice getting fainter as he wasn’t sure what he was even talking about.

‘Why are you talking about vitamin D3, you dumbass!’

“Vitah-min Dee Tree?”

‘Does he mean that I need to be steadfast as an unmoving tree... or bend like a slim tree that survives even great cyclones. Is that the name of some kind of secret technique... D-did he say I had a lovely complexion?’

Feng Liena thought to herself, while Zhang Dong wanted to hit his head on the nearby wall.

“Tee hee~, you sure have a way with words brother Dong. Maybe the texts weren’t all that wrong, I’ll have to examine them once more when we return.”

She looked at him while covering her mouth with her sleeve, she then walked away after excusing herself with a proper bow. Matt wasn’t sure what the cultivator woman took out from his nonsense response, but at least she looked happy when she was going away. After the coast was clear, he gave out a sigh and went back to cultivating managing to absorb the two weapons within the hour. His body refining progress jumped up by ten percent, these last boss weapons were a lot better than the ones he found along the way in the jungle.

‘Guess it’s time to check that tower out... will it be that hell motive... think limbo came first...’

Everyone gathered up in front of the large locked door. Matt nodded as they decided that one of the weaker members would try to place their palm on the door. They didn’t want their strongest members to activate any traps as they needed them for fighting. The monk volunteered for this and after placing his palm on the door they heard gears moving as it opened up.

The moment the door opened a peculiar sweet fragrance hit their noses, Matt covered his mouth and churned his cultivations to stop the fragrance from going further into his body, not knowing if it was poisonous or not. Then they entered inside, the inside looked quite high class. It was only a short hall at first and another door inside, they tried opening it but it wouldn’t budge probably because not everyone from the group had entered through the door just yet.

“Okay let’s go then...”

The door shut itself behind them, the red carpet on the wooden floor guided them forward as the previously shut door finally opened. Inside it looked like a ballroom, many crystal chandeliers lit it up and there were some people dancing inside. Matt narrowed his eyes, the people were wearing fancy dresses but there was something peculiar about them, they had horns and thin black tails

Incubus [Core formation middle level]Succubus [Core formation middle level]

They were dancing in pairs around a certain woman. The woman had larger horns and a larger tail, her eyes were glowing in a red hue. She was wearing something that looked like a Victorian-era dress, with a lot of space to see her ample cleavage, that corset was doing wonders for it.

The Sin of Lust [Core formation Late Stage+(Half Step Great Circle)]

‘Wait, never saw that plus sign before... Sin of Lust? did they mix up the genres?’

Matt was expecting the nine levels of hell, but it looked like he would be getting the seven deadly sins instead.

Chapter 95

Matt eyed the lady standing in the middle, she had a demonic air around her. She was looking straight at them, there was an alluring smile on her face. The other people in the room were dancing to the old fashioned music in the rather large hall, Matt wasn’t sure what this was about but before he could think about it more, one of his party members moved forward.

“Hoho... what a beauty!”

It was Huo Qiang, he had a strange look in his eyes while staring at the alluring woman in the victorian ere dress. Matt took the time to look at his horny brother’s status, he was even starting to drool while staring at the busty succubus.

Huo Qiang [Core formation late stage] (Charmed)

He thought that he had managed to pass the will or fortitude check, he wasn’t sure himself as he didn’t really play those kinds of games back in his day. Besides the hornball that had close to a hundred concubines, the member from the Kwok clan was starting to pant the monk was chanting as some kind of energy shield formed around him giving off a golden light. Qiang’s retainer was somehow holding up, but he was shaking a bit as well the women in the group seemed unaffected.

“We shall not fall under your demonic plot, foul demon!”

The monk proclaimed as the golden light surrounding his body burst forward encompassing the whole group. Matt could see the charmed status vanish after the shield formed around them, Qiang staggered forward while rubbing his head not really sure what was going on.

“Huh? What was I doing?”

“Well, I think you almost went and proclaimed your undying love to that demon lady over there”

Matt replied to Qiang’s question while pointing at the Sin of lust, after the monk formed the protective shield the woman’s seductive gaze turned to one of rage. The music stopped and every succubus and incubus in the room looked at them.

“Insolent creatures!”

The horned lady shouted out as her body got surrounded in a shadowy aura, covering her whole body and only leaving the face out in the open. The aura looked like gray liquid and it moved around her limbs

quickly switching to a darker and sinister coloring. The reason for it was soon revealed as the clothing that the demonic woman was wearing switched from a classy lady dress to something out of a bondage dungeon.

Matt gulped as he heard the loud whip cracking, the woman's high heels clicked on the floor as she moved slightly forward. She was wearing a skin-tight black latex suit, with a window to display her tightly squeezed bosom.

"Watch out, they have some kind of ability that deludes your mind, you might attack others around you if you aren't careful."

Zhang Dong shouted it out while pulling out his longsword, he moved forward he wasn't affected by the charm debuff so he could go out of the shield and fight it out with the demonic woman. Though there were quite a lot of those lower monsters to clean up too, would be difficult if he had to face them on his own. But luckily he wasn't alone and one of his party members had just the thing for this occasion.

"Everyone, take a talisman it will protect you from the demonic influence!"

The monk was coming in handy, he had carved out some talismans from some leaves that he plucked from the forest area. Thank's to his foresight everyone in the group was able to attach an evil repelling talisman that would temporarily shield them. How much those would hold out was unknown, but it was probably better than having them remain in that small golden shield while he got whipped around by the angry-looking horned lady.

The first stage of the tower was turning out to just be a boss area, there were around fifty of those dancing demons. Their clothes were also transforming to look more latexy getups. What was different about their apparel was that they had their faces covered, looking like gimps with spikes attached in various places. The men of the group were quite shocking, having a large metal spike right between their legs which made Feng Liena look away in disgust.

When the battle started the Sin of lust gave out a shrill scream, shattering all of the crystal chandeliers in the area. She gave her own followers a couple of good whips with her weapon, the creatures screaming out in ecstasy as the pain washed over their backs.

"Kill them all my lovelies, make your Mistress proud and you might get rewarded~"

The gimp army charged out, everyone looked invigorated at the mention of a reward from their Mistress. Matt wasn't sure who designed this place, but he wanted to give him a couple of smacks. They were outnumbered by quite a bit, but luckily the boss of the area decided to use her minions first while sitting back in a throne. Her legs were crossed over one another and resting on the back of one of her minions, the high heels were digging into the incubus' back and drawing blood, but the person in question looked quite ecstatic.

'Should I engage the boss alone or should I help the others and whittle them down with them...'

He wasn't sure if the people behind him could handle the assault of the gimp troop. He wanted to believe in them though, during the jungle part they showed to be capable and there was even the monk with good anti demonic abilities.

"Can I trust you with those creatures' minions?"

He asked the other cultivators, the boss wasn't all that strong judging by the system message but if they truly thought that they needed his help he would play it safe.

"Fear not brother Dong, we will handle these trash demons, go and give that bitch a good thrashing!"

Huo Qiang spat on the floor as he got to the bitch part, he looked quite angry due to the fact that he got charmed before.

"Leave it to us, young Patriarch."

Replied the old lady, while already gathering wind energy into her staff.

"That's reassuring."

He gave the people a smile then turned around, looking at the charging monsters. Some of them were running on their hands and feet, some were clawing their way onto the walls and ceiling as they tried to surround the group from all sides. Matt ignored them as he pushed his Qi into his legs again, he used his body as a battering ram and with a thumping sound took off running.

The wooden floor burst open the moment he charged forward, the monsters tried to block his advanced but they just lost their limbs in the process. He burst through the small wall of latex-clad people and aimed his sword at the sitting seductress, but just as he was about to strike her down, his sword encountered a hidden barrier.

"Ufufu~ What's the rush little piggy? Why don't you play with my lovelies first~?"

He smashed his fist into the barrier but to no avail and then jumped back as one of the incubus men tried swiping at him with a clawed hand. The monsters around here looked like beings from a fetish video, they had hooks going into their flesh that was getting pulled apart. Some of those hooks were in their eyes or in their mouth as well, they truly looked grotesque.

'Guess I have to clear out those guys first...'

While Matt was battling the hellish guards his cultivator friends were doing their best as well. The monsters were quite strong all things considered, but luckily they were attacking without any tactics just rushing in blindly. They were still at a disadvantage though, they were outnumbered and there wasn't really any place to run. The hall was quite large, about the size of a football field but even though there were windows to the sides they were indestructible.

They found that out the moment they tried flinging one of the monsters outside. They expected the glass to shatter but instead, the gimp's head burst like a tomato after it made contact with the transparent material. This was clearly a sealed-off space, either they would kill the monster or they would die instead.

Matt looked back while smacking a monster to the side with a well-placed kick, shattering its body in half while electrocuting it at the same time. The others were holding out, the Feng clan members were good at blasting the gimp rush back while the Huo clan members were quite adept at setting them ablaze. The new sabers were showing promise already, as many heads were rolling around on the hall floor.

"Enough!"

The woman on the throne shouted just as Matt managed to slay the last one of her guards, the barrier vanished and she strode forward. Her hips swayed side to side, but that wasn't all that was swaying with them. At this point, Matt was mostly immune to womanly charms as those so he just gripped his longsword and defended himself as the woman's fingernails extended and she tried to tear his face apart.

"Who are you... you're the first one that can actually talk..."

Matt asked while evading a couple of high heel kicks to the face and groin area, the latter attack made him sway backward while sweating.

"Silence pig, you could have had a pleasurable demise, but now you will only suffer!"

She clearly didn't want to talk, or couldn't if she was actually a real person with a mind was still up to debate. Matt wanted to pry some answers from her, maybe she would be more willing to talk if he cut off an arm or two...

His eyes started glowing in bright blue light, electricity forming around him as he got more serious. He activated his body refining skill, perceiving the surroundings in slow motion. Soon the attacks rained down, the monster woman was quite fast and the whipping attacks were quite hard to read, but soon enough she found herself with her weapon arm missing after Zhang Dong got a good shot in.

"YOU INSIGNIFICANT PIG!"

She looked quite mad, her body started executing a terrifying aura as it glowed in purple light. The next attack was a lot harder to receive as Zhang Dong found himself getting pushed back, instead of the whip the Sin of lust used her remaining arm and legs raining down a barrage close-ranged blows.

'She suddenly powered up... similar to when a boss monster loses half of its HP and goes into a second form or changes its attacking pattern.'

She was quite fast and strong, but still, she wasn't in the great circle stage while Matt was content on fighting experts at that level without a problem at this point. Soon enough the monster's head was flying through the air, the only injury he suffered was a rip to his clothes and some cut hair while he was dodging, maybe a shorter haircut was due.

The moment the monster was slain the remaining mobs disintegrated into colorful lights. The cultivators behind him gave off a sigh of relief as they also managed to survive the predicament with minor injuries.

Congratulations on passing the first floor, you may now proceed to the library, the next floor will open in exactly 24 hours.

The voice sounded quite robotic, like something a text to speech app would sound like. A new door appeared out of nowhere with a sign 'Library first level' the cultivators that he was with were bewildered by the strange voice, but Matt kind of knew what it was about.

'This is probably some kind of resting area between the levels, might also be a safe zone.'

"I think we should go inside not like there is anything left in this room for us."

The monsters had vanished and there were no weapons left for him to take with him, after some deliberation everyone headed through the door to the so-called library. What greeted them were books, scrolls, and manuscripts, quite a load of them.

Chapter 96

The door behind them vanished after everyone passed through it. The group found themselves in a corridor at first, torches on the sides as the only thing they could do was walk forward. Soon enough they could see some light at the end of that corridor and they were greeted to rows upon rows of books. A peculiar feeling washed through the people here, their stamina and wounds were recovered almost instantly after going through the library entrance.

‘This is an actual safe zone... would be nice if it also had a save point’

The so-called library was quite circular, the long shelves of books formed rings around each other as the collection expanded outwards. In the middle of the large library hall, there was a large circular tube. The tube went upwards and into the ceiling, in the middle there looked to be something akin to sliding doors and a number ‘1’ above it.

‘Is that an elevator...?’

It looked like a normal elevator, it had all the required buttons like the ones that opened and closed the doors. While the other cultivators were glancing at the books, Matt walked up to the elevator and pressed the button that should open it but nothing happened.

‘The doors aren’t opening... maybe it’s locked until we clear the other levels?’

There were seven buttons on that elevator, which correlated to the seven deadly sins theme of this test. He left the elevator for now, as after poking every button nothing was happening. He then heard some of his companions speaking out.

“These books are all for Qi condensation practitioners... but the quality is astonishing!”

He looked at them going through some scriptures, their eyes focused as they were going through the old knowledge. Matt didn’t wait much before he picked up one book and used the help of his system to scan its worth.

Crimson Phoenix Immolation Palm (First Scripture) [Mortal High Grade]

‘Oh, it is indeed a high grade technique for a Qi condensation manual... and only the first part of it...’

He glanced over it, his system gave him more statics than just the grade of the technique. He also had the option to save it to his system library without having to actually absorb the knowledge outright and get a migraine while doing it.

Name :	Star Phoenix Immolation Palm(First scripture)
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Meant for :	Qi Condensation Cultivators (6+)
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Grade :	Mortal High Grade
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Requirements
: Fire Affinity C+ grade and up

Qi usage: Moderate-High

Description : This art has been designed with close combat in mind, the practitioners gather their Qi into their palm transferring it into their opponent's body during a clash. The inserted Qi wrecks havoc inside the enemy's body burning them from the inside. The correct use of this art will produce a Phoenix tattoo on the practitioner's palm. Further scriptures allow the summoning of an actual Phoenix that aids in the attack.

'This doesn't look bad... quite deadly as it's an internal attack, it might even go through someone's body refining defenses.'

He started going through the manuscripts closest to him, they were all for practitioners in the Qi condensation and they were all above the mortal low grade. He looked up at the bookcase, it had the symbol of fire above it this was probably why everything in this section was for fire-based cultivators.

"Think this section of the library would be fit for the Huo clan."

Matt brought this to attention as Huo Qiang came over. He and his retainer's jaw opened up wide as they read the previously picked up Crimson Phoenix Immolation Palm, but this wasn't even the best one amongst the techniques that were lined up there. There were various ones, punching arts, kicking arts, ones for using weapons even regular cultivation manuals that were probably above anything that the Huo clan had in their own library back home.

"This is a treasure trove of knowledge if we could bring those books back with us..."

The two men had sparkles in their eyes as they went through some of the displayed cultivation manuals. Matt was a bit less optimistic than the two as he didn't think that the person that made this place would just let them clean the library out. He was more inclined in thinking that they might be able to take a couple of them later, or even worse as they would get none. With the second option, they would probably have to focus on learning the desired art in the limited time period they had in this library.

"I wouldn't get my hopes up, I bet they immortal senior that gathered all these books here wouldn't just let us take them with us."

Well, this was just something that the others had to contend with, Matt, on the other hand, could just copy everything into his library with a couple of clicks. Thus he did that, while his party members were going through some scriptures and old texts he started poking them while they were still on the shelves.

Fist of the Supreme General [Mortal High Grade] Do you wish to copy this text to the system library?

He clicked yes and moved over to the next book repeating the motion over and over again. The people in the large room were a bit bewildered as they saw Zhang Dong move his finger up in the air while tracing his other finger through the lined-up books. Was this some kind of technique to find the best secret text or something? They didn't want to ask as the man looked quite focused, his fingers were moving at an amazing speed while he was squinting.

'Damn... is there no faster way to do this... there are thousands of books here... this is going to take a while.'

He was familiar with this procedure already, as he did the same thing back at the Zhang Clan library. Though the clan's library wasn't as huge as this one and didn't have all these varying cultivation arts. He even found some lightning-related techniques here, focusing on copying them down as he frantically went through the entire place, he had to get everything down in those 24 hours, he might not have a second try.

He was soon like a blur, hands kicking up winds as he copied everything down without even reading what the skill was for. Everything was going to be shoved into his database, he dreaded the day when he would have to write everything down or use jade slips instead. Thanks to this library being so orderly and circular, he was sure that he wouldn't miss anything if he just went in order. Time soon passed and the next stage was upon them.

Zhang Dong managed to finish the 'plagiarising' procedure an hour early, so he had some time to think about the new stage and rest up. As the 24th hour ticked down the scenery became a blur. There was no voice or message the scenery just switched to a small room with another door in front. Everyone looked surprised, they were just reading some scriptures contemplating the basics and foundation of their techniques as they got teleported here, the books that they were studying just evaporating into nothingness as they found themselves in a sterile room.

"I guess they won't let us take those books out of there, guess that was expected."

Matt mentioned his theory to the others while going towards the door in front.

"Hope everyone is ready, there are probably be more monsters inside and I bet they will be stronger than the previous ones."

Everyone got ready while Zhang Dong grabbed the handle and swung the door open, soon enough everyone stepped through the door. They were greeted with a flash of bright light and a scenery change. The first thing that Matt noticed after taking a step in that the ground was strangely squishy.

'Ugh... what is this?'

He grimaced as he looked at the scenery, the ground and walls looked like they were made from pink flesh. They were in some kind of corridor once again but it looked to be alive.

"Are we in some kind of beast's belly?"

One of the cultivators asked while poking the flesh wall, it was warm to the touch and when you sliced it blood would gush out. There were no spasming or trembling that would accompany attacks to someone's insides, so maybe they weren't inside some creature just some badly created scenery.

'The person that made these trials sure has some strange fetishes...'

Matt thought to himself, but as he wanted to move on Kwok Xun started grasping his stomach.

"What is this feeling ...s-so hungry... "

He was looking at the fleshy walls in the surroundings with reddish eyes and drool coming out of his mouth, this prompted Matt to look at his status screen.

Kwok Xun [Core Formation middle stage] (Starvation)

‘Yeah... figures, seven deadly sins...’

Luckily they had the monk with them, he was surprisingly good against curses and debuffing effects like they were encountering in this place. Soon a golden shield surrounded them once more, letting Xun sigh out after the horrid longing to eat the fleshy walls subsided.

“I think these trials are going to amplify the humanly desires... how many of those talismans do you have on you...?... you never told us your name...”

Matt asked while looking at the monk that was chanting.

“You may call me Bankei. Forgive me, but I only have a handful left and I don’t have any more materials to make more.”

He said respectfully while holding the barrier up, Matt rubbed his chin he seemed to be unaffected by the mental game like debuffs probably due to his previously acquired skill that protected his mind.

“Brother Bankei, how long can you keep this golden barrier up?”

“I can sustain it for twelve hours, longer if I have something to replenish my spiritual energies.”

Zhang Dong nodded while looking to the side at the other cultivators.

‘Think that should be enough... it’s not a very hard skill to learn and I already upgraded my Impartation of Knowledge to a high degree.’

The answer to the problems was quite easy, he had the skill and he could easily pass it on to others. So he didn’t wait much, before moving over to his first ‘victim’.

“I’m going to pass on a secret art to you now, it will protect you from the strange afflictions that these trials are putting us under.”

He was a bit ashamed that he didn’t think about it sooner if they were placed in a boss room from the get-go it could have turned out quite badly. Kwok Xun was the first person that was left with a migraine, grasping his forehead after Zhang Dong poked it with his finger.

“T-this is... truly astonishing... my gratitude!”

He bowed to Zhang Dong before going down into the lotus position to cultivate this skill. Soon everyone besides the Bankei was down on the ground, trying to cultivate the Tranquil Mind technique, there should be no problems with the debuffs later on after they were done.

‘I sure hope that this place doesn’t have a timer on it or something...’

Time passed and the cultivators finished at a varying degree, the youngsters like Huo Qiang and Feng Liena were the fastest, showing that their high cultivation stage at their current age wasn’t just for show. The slowest was Feng Maling which caused the tanned Feng Matriarch to blush a bit in shame.

The effects of 'starvation' was now gone even though Bankei pulled back his barrier, they could move. The monk didn't need Zhang Dong's cultivation technique as his sect had a lot of skills that shielded them from demonic influences. Matt passed it on to him anyway, he would feel bad if the guy was the only one not profiting while having to hold that barrier up for so long.

The team moved forward, going through the fleshy corridors as the second trial 'officially' begun.

Chapter 97

The second trial wasn't anything out of the ordinary, at least not for Matt. The boss monster looked like a giant head of an obese person with tentacles coming out of its neck area which it used to move and wiggle around the main boss room. He was already 90% sure that the person that designed this so-called tower trial was someone from Earth. If they weren't from Earth they must have either came from a very similar place or they visited it for an undisclosed amount of time.

The monster went through some generic boss phases where it ducked its head into the fleshy wall and started attacking everyone with its tentacles. While doing so the main body couldn't be damaged and the cultivators couldn't do anything besides dodging. It was even telegraphing some of its attacks which allowed the people to dodge with ease. Soon enough the monster was dead and they were taken back to the library.

"That went rather well brother Dong, I'm sure we can get through this trial and get the treasure at the end! But even this Library here is already a treasure trove, only if it weren't only techniques for Qi cultivation juniors."

Huo Qiang furrowed his brows a bit while picking up a fire elemental cultivation technique from the side.

"Oh... I think there will be more than only those..."

Matt said while walking up to the elevator, Feng Liena next to him as she was curious about what he was doing.

"Do you know something about this magical door, Brother Dong?"

She asked while glancing between the elevator and him curiously. Matt smiled a bit as that face that she was making was kind of cute.

'I sure hope this works, otherwise, I'll look a bit silly...'

He pressed the button to open up the door and waited. Soon enough the doors opened themselves up and revealed an open area inside.

"See, now it opens. I bet we can go to the second level of the library with this elevator."

The people gathered around him, slowly going inside and looking at the buttons that ranged from one to seven.

"So this is called an elevator? What a strange name... how do you know this, Brother Dong?"

Feng Liena asked, her face beaming with curiosity while Matt's palms started to sweat.

"I ah... left my clan for ten years and traveled the world, I came across a lot of ancient ruins and found a lot of wisdom that described things like these here..."

Feng Liena clapped her hands while smiling up to Zhang Dong as if she bought his excuse.

"Ah, that explains why you are so knowledgeable about these trials. When we get out I must also travel the world and visit those sites!"

The girl pumped herself up a bit while the old lady from the side started shaking her head.

"You must not young Matriarch, you are supposed to lead our clan now, we can't have you going around visiting strange dangerous places!"

The old woman was clearly against it, the happy expression vanished from Liena's face and got replaced by a cute pout. That was not something a woman in her forties should probably do, which made Matt chuckle a bit.

"Brother Dong you laughed, how could you!"

She pointed an accusing finger at the man that tried to cover his face up with his sleeve.

"I don't know what you are talking about Sister Liena... you sure it wasn't Brother Qiang?"

Qiang looked from the side, eyes narrowing as he looked at Zhang Dong.

"Hey, don't get me involved in this!"

The atmosphere in the elevator became a bit lighthearted as the cultivators started laughing, soon enough they heard a beep and the door opened up to a similar-looking library room. The people spread out to see what was on this level, Matt grasped one book and was surprised when he read the title.

"Oh? It's an encyclopedia about basic herbs found in the world?"

"Hey, these aren't combat manuals or cultivation manuals, they are books about various occupations."

This level had the basic knowledge required to be an Apothecary or an Alchemist that forged pills that cultivators were so crazy to devour at astonishing rates. This wasn't all though, there were crafting manuals, manuals about the anatomy of the human or beast body that would help you become a beast tamer or a physician.

"This is even better than the first level... if we could only get this out of here..."

Huo Qiang lamented while going through the books, he knew well that these books were a treasure trove of wisdom that you could build a strong clan or sect on. What was an Apothecary? It was someone who could make magical pills that increased the rate of someone's cultivation. There were various pill formulas here that even though they were most suited for Qi Condensation and Foundation Establishment cultivators, were quite the gem.

This wasn't all, there were formation array manuals ones for aspiring blacksmiths with a lot of blueprints for defensive and offensive treasures. There was everything to start you off and set you on the path of a master in a given occupation.

Even though this level was even better than the first one, the people here gave out a sigh. They were mostly combating oriented cultivators, none of them would really profit much from these manuscripts and ancient texts. Still, they still dabbled in a couple of occupations so they could use this time to read up on things they got stuck in.

Zhang Dong just did his thing in copying over every last book into his system library, he didn't even know how many points he would have to spend to get these kinds of resources from the system cash shop.

'Jackpot!'

"Ah, if you want to get back to the other level just press the button with the letter one on it, it will bring you down there. When you want to get back here, just press the number two."

He gave out the information, maybe the other cultivators wanted to read up on the combat arts more than about forging pills or swords. So hours passed and everyone diligently read, well everyone besides Zhang Dong that was running around like a madman and waving his finger around in rapid motions.

"Cookie clicker skills, don't fail me now!"

The people didn't know what he meant with that, but he looked absorbed in his task so they left him alone. He was a reliable asset to this ragtag team of cultivators, but he still had his quirks but that was normal as most high-level cultivators were eccentrics. Or so thought the other eccentrics in the group.

So passed the days, the group had been in the secret ground for over a month now but they were still hanging in. They kept finishing the trials which followed a similar pattern. Sometimes they had to move through a larger area killing of monsters or gathering items that would open the path to a boss area. On other occasions they were dropped into the boss room from the start, having to cope with the sudden attacks.

The library levels started opening up as Matt gained more and more books into his library, on the third level there were more combat and cultivation manuals but this time around they were for Foundation Establishment cultivators. They were of superior grading than what the people had in their clan's back home ranging from lower-level earth grade all up into the perfect grade.

As expected on the fourth level there were more pill forging formulas and blueprints, they were on a higher level than the ones that were on the second level. The items produced from here could very well be used by core formation cultivators which made a lot of them try to memorize the pill formulas that increased someone's cultivation rate or replenished their spiritual essence.

"Maybe if I carve this formula onto my thigh I can take it out with me..."

Some of them had some crazy idea's, Matt just smiled as he went through the whole library finishing up a lot faster than before as the higher the level of the library was, the fewer books there were.

On the fifth level, they encountered their first boss monster that was in the great circle of core formation. This was quite the angry-looking beast looking like a behemoth, which fit the Sin of Wrath name quite well. The area they were fighting it was in a colosseum, they even had some strange skeleton-like creatures in the stands cheering at them while they battled the ferocious-looking beast.

The team of cultivators were already used to fighting these trials, so even though the monster's power was above them they weren't afraid. They knew that they only needed to support Zhang Dong by activating various game-like mechanics around the stage, they already knew their own strengths and weaknesses everyone kind of having a sense of comradery as they were even able to joke around in the midst of battle.

Soon the beast was slain and everyone returned back to the library, the new level finally having cultivation manuals that could be used by these elders. Everyone frantically searched for the best cultivation method they could find, hoping that they could remember them. They even begged Zhang Dong for a part of his robe on which they could write it down with their blood as they knew that his clothes could regenerate.

After hearing that Matt wanted to tell them that he could remember the cultivation arts and that he would write it down for them later. But on second thought, in their stead, he would probably write it down himself for safekeeping, even if someone else offered to do it instead. Always better to have a backup plan, he could share some knowledge with them later.

'Envy and Pride left, this monster had an extremely hard hide, it took a while to pierce its defense.'

'Think the only reason we made it this deep in, is due to not being affected by the mental attacks.'

If he were to get a berserk status like in the Sin of Wrath stage, he could very well wipe his entire team out by himself in a fit of rage. The whole party would probably tear each other apart.

'Think Envy would give some kind of jealousy debuff, probably you wouldn't be able to trust each other and get paranoid. Not sure what Pride would do though... being too prideful to ask for help?'

He had some free time as he wandered through the library levels, hoping to find more stuff than just the books, to no avail though.

'I'm close to the great circle with my body refining, but these blasted bosses aren't dropping any items...'

While he was saddened by the fact that he had no weapons to absorb, he looked at a metal candleholder. It was quite elongated and only had space for one candle, it looked like you could clobber someone good with one of those. He focused on it, his analyzing skill getting activated as he was spacing out.

Candleholder Club Middle Earth Grade

'What?'

He quickly snatched the thing from the table it was standing on, the library having various tables and chairs in which you could rest and read in peace. He instantly checked if there was a reaction to his body refining absorption skill and to his surprise the candleholder was reacting.

"Yes...YES!!!"

He shouted out, luckily the people around were already used to his strange outbursts so they didn't seem bothered. He snatched a couple of those candleholders as quickly as possible as he didn't have much time and took the elevator down to get even more. He moved into a more secluded place and

started cultivating diligently. The metal from the item started melting as it flowed into his body, increasing his body by refining percentages and pushing it towards that hundred percent mark.

“Body refining great circle, here I come! Golden candleholder body awaken!”

He cheered while thinking if there were some metallic plates or ashtrays that he could also absorb.

Chapter 98

The Envy trial was over, the boss monsters weren’t really hard to beat if you took care of the afflictions that the stages gave you. Matt felt like he was cheating with his skills, but not like he was complaining as on the fifth level there were core formation manuals. On the sixth level, there were more crafting, forging and pill formulas reaching towards things core formation and even some nascent soul experts could profit from. His cultivation nut buddies were drooling at the books that they were holding, some were of the Heavenly rank. Matt was holding one of those cultivation manuals in his hand, this was the third part of the series and he hoped that he would find the last one on the next level as well.

Name :	Supreme Thunder God’s Penetrative Nirvana Finger (Third Tome)
Meant for :	Core Formation (Middle Stage+)
Grade :	Heaven Middle Grade
Requirements:	Lightning B+ grade and up
Qi usage:	High
Description :	Finger attack focusing the cultivators lightning Qi into their fingertips. The longer you charge this attack the stronger it will be, possesses supreme penetrating power.

‘Looks good, but who came out in that name... I feel like the FBI will come after me if I use that on someone.’

He didn’t think he would be able to find some techniques that were better than the ones he bought of his system store. But there were ones of heaven grading mostly the lower one but still. The number of books on the fifth and sixth levels was quite limited so he didn’t need the whole twenty-four hours to copy them down.

First came the body refining though, he had pried every metallic object from the walls or ceiling that had some weapon sounding suffix and prefix. He didn’t expect that the items around here would have a grading, who would expect to find earth graded items scattered here. But even then he didn’t find much besides the candleholders or some metal quills.

While his friends were on the sixth and fifth-level scrambling to write things down, or remembering them he was on the second level cultivating. This was the one that no one really visited, having the most basic crafting manuals on it that no one really wanted.

He could feel the warm metallic substance enter his body as he felt the familiar feeling. He was breaking through, his muscles tensed up and his body started shining brightly. He looked like a golden statue that had been polished and spotlights were pointed at it. After the breakthrough, he glanced at his status screen, which he didn’t really bring up for quite a while.

Name :	Zhang Dong
Affiliation :	Zhang Clan
Spirit Points :	423267
Cultivation Base Qi :	Core Formation [Late Stage 2 %] (Empowered Lightning Core)
Cultivation Base Body :	Core Formation [Great Circle 0,5 %] (Golden Body)
Techniques :	Empowered Lightning Qi cultivation art, Golden Body Arts, Thunderlight Sword, Thunder Movement Art...
Dao :	Dao of Heavenly Lightning, Dao of Smithing and Crafting
Other :	Senior Aura, Impartation of Knowledge, Mentor's Eyes, Appraisal...

'Well, my cultivation base didn't increase at all... but the body refining is finally up there. I wish I could get that upgrade though...'

He still had some candleholders on the side, luckily there were some chandeliers here and there so the place wasn't all dark. But it was certainly darker than what you expect from a library building.

'I bet the guys have some magic arts to see better or spirit up some glowing whisp for it...'

Matt went back to cultivating, the remaining items not really pushing his cultivation forward that much as he was earning fractions of percentages even from earth middle graded items. He would take what he could get, couldn't really complain about the free items but he knew that he wasn't getting to the nascent soul anytime soon. The description on his body refining also had a new line in it, he required a heaven graded item to advance after getting 100%.

'Here is hoping there will actually be some tangible rewards on the 7th level.'

Time winded down and the group soon found themselves at the last stage. They were walking down a curved set of stairs while the surroundings were just a starry void. There was a large platform above them where they were walking to, lights appeared on the side of those stairs that looked like blue Wisps. The whole place was dead silent the only things that could be heard were their footsteps and breathing.

"This should be the last one, wonder what my clan members are doing now..."

Matt said while walking ahead a couple of steps, he was in the front so he couldn't really see the other cultivator's expressions. The others were reminded about their own clans, they hadn't seen them for over a month now and had no way of knowing if they were still alive.

"I'm sure the junior members made it through, Feng Daiyu might not be the brightest but her strength speaks for itself."

Feng Maling proclaimed while looking at her worried Matriarch that was deep in thought after hearing Zhang Dong mention his own clan.

Soon the group was at the top, the stage was round and there was nothing on it besides one thing. A person was sitting on a large throne, looking at them while resting his cheek on his right hand. His legs were spread apart, his eyes wide open and red in coloring. He was looking at the group of people, seemingly annoyed at the cultivator's late arrival.

"It took you long enough..."

Sin of Pride [Core Formation Great Circle]

The man looked quite bored as he leaned back in his throne, he looked like someone in his thirties. He was wearing a red robe and had horns coming out of his head that curved inwards. His hair was white just like Matt's and he was of similar stature as the lightning cultivator.

"Let me congratulate you on reaching this point in your journey. Not many people manage this feat."

He didn't look like he would be getting up from his throne anytime soon as he just switched the hand he was leaning on to the other one and continued babbling some exposition.

"Most people never get the Sin of Greed, I congratulate you on resisting your natural predisposition."

Guess he was talking about how cultivators in this world would murder their own family just to get that one pill which pushed their cultivation forward a level. The trial he was talking about just showed them some powerful treasures, they were supposed to fight each other for them. But they were just illusions that were easily dispelled by Matt's mind technique, but he wouldn't tell the boss that the trial debuffs and tricks were useless against his Tranquil Will.

"Think I need to invest in better mind fortifying techniques, they will probably be crucial if I ever visit other secret grounds like this. The people making those always like to test people by showing them illusions or things like their worst fears to test them."

The boss started recounting all the trials, congratulating the whole group while they looked at him trying to measure his strength.

"This one is strong..."

Huo Qiang mentioned while sweating a bit from the overbearing aura that the Sin of Pride was giving off.

Matt wasn't quite sure, but thanks to his level up in body refining he was content on defeating this monster in a one on one.

"After saying this...you have two choices..."

The man finally stood up from his throne, his arms going behind his back as he stood like your regular senior cultivator.

“You may face me together, but if you do that you forfeit further rewards. The second option would be to face me in a one on one battle, if one of you manages to defeat me, you may take one item from the seventh level.”

The man grinned and spread his arms as he looked at the people in front of him.

“What say you? Will you attack me all together like a bunch of cowards, or are there any warriors amongst you that are up to the challenge?”

Some of the male cultivators behind Matt went red in the face after they got called cowards, but after feeling the man’s aura they decided not to go forward just yet. While the people were hesitating behind him, Matt took a step forward chest straight up, his steps slow and steady.

“I’ll face you...”

The horned man looked at Zhang Dong that was approaching him, his eyes scanning his opponent that was only in the late stage of core formation.

“You sure are a brave young man, are you sure about this?”

Matt walked forward, getting closer and closer while hearing the other cultivators shout at him from behind.

“Are you sure about this Zhang clan Patriarch? This might be a trap.”

Feng Maling chimed in while trying to look at the surrounding area if there were any other monsters around.

“Yes brother Dong, maybe you should reconsider?”

Feng Liena said while looking worried, the idea of the treasures was tempting but it would be better to play it safe.

Matt stopped for a moment to think about it, but for some reason, he didn’t feel like he would lose. When he looked back to when he arrived in this place, he couldn’t remember a situation that he couldn’t just fight his way through. He had an easy ride thanks to the system so his ego was quite inflated at this point, the trial of Pride was made for people like Zhang Dong. He only suffered minor setbacks which were mostly due to his inexperience in fighting, but due to passing the jungle and having fought his way through it with ease he was feeling confident. So what if this was the creature’s plan? He was sure that he could just bulldoze through him like he always did.

“Well then, let the trial begin!”

The Sin of Pride smirked while a translucent dome of energy appeared between the area he and Matt were in and the area where the others were. Everyone looked on nervously as the two combatants moved closer to each other. They knew that Zhang Dong was strong, probably the strongest core formation cultivator that they had ever seen, but he was making a rookie mistake now. He was letting himself get pulled into the enemy’s scheme, it would be much safer to fight him as a group. Still though, if he won they would be getting more rewards, on the other hand, if he died they would probably not be able to defeat this monster even in a group.

“Why are the young always like this.”

Feng Maling shook her head while looking at the youth that like many others before him, wasn't thinking with their brain and with their muscles instead.

“Let's believe in brother Dong, he is strong!”

Huo Qiang cheered while poking the shield that appeared before him, after the smack he felt a repelling force that pushed him back.

While the others sighed behind the barrier Matt was now standing in striking distance of the so-called Sin of Pride. The man was quite handsome, well built and smiling at his opponent while looking confident. The two stared at each other for a good few moments before the boss spoke up.

“Are you going to just stand there? Here, I'll give you the first one for free.”

The man laughed at Zhang Dong while turning his cheek to the side and pointing at it, it looked like he was willing to receive a hit without dodging. Matt raised his brow at this display and shrugged, guess this guy was really sure of his strength he would have to bring him down a peg.

Matt could feel that the restrictions that he felt back in the jungle area weren't that strong inside this barrier. He could probably let loose in here, while thinking like that he started gathering energy into his fist. He pulled his fist back, blue lightning energy gathering into it as he charged his attack up.

Matt's robe and the man's fluttered as due to gathering so much spiritual energy wind was getting kicked up. His muscles bulged as he moved his arm backward, he was going for a normal punch with all his weight behind it along with some lightning energy. The Sin of Pride looked at the large fist that was getting charged up, Matt wasn't sure what he was thinking about but it didn't seem that he was going to dodge.

‘Prideful, huh?’

The punch was finally thrown, a loud booming sound resounded inside the barrier as the fist filled with energy connected with a face. Matt could feel his strike going through, but he was surprised. The man's face was extremely hard, even with his body refining skill at the great circle he felt the attack down to his bones.

The man was forced backward, but he didn't fly as Matt expected but slid along the ground with his feet firmly planted on it coming to a stop after about ten meters. His face was turned to the side and you could see a red mark at the spot that Zhang Dong punched him. Sin of Pride moved his hand to his jaw, rubbing it slightly a grin appearing on his face.

“Nice hit!”

He spat out some blood while cracking his neck slightly, his hand on his jaw as he rubbed it slightly.

“Hey, I had an idea! Do you want to play a fun game?”

The man looked quite excited now, his eyes were wide open as he moved back to where he previously was. He moved his hand back, in a similar motion that Matt did and looked at his opponent.

“It’s quite the fun little game~”

He replied with vigor in his voice, like he found something interesting.

Chapter 99

The ground shook, Feng Liena covered her face with the sleeve of her robe as she looked at what was happening inside the barrier bubble. She saw Zhang Dong receiving a devastating right hook right to his face. His face was bounced backwards and it looked like it would leave his neck and fly into space while he staggered. The residual shockwave from the devastating stroke tossing up a storm as even the sturdy floor was slowly showing a sign of cracks.

Zhang Dong shook his head a bit as he looked back at his opponent who was grinning widely. He was bleeding from a cut lower lip, the blood slowly dripping down onto the floor and his clothes. He looked quite happy though, moving his hand backwards and then crossing his hands over his own chest as he smirked.

“Your turn~”

Matt looked at the Sin of Pride, not really sure how the situation turned this way. He was having a good old fashioned slugfest with the guy. The man wasn’t blocking and neither was he, they were having a competition of strength and resilience. Something was pushing him forward though, the more he saw the demon man smirk and smile the more he wanted to slam his fist into his face.

Another devastating blow landed, the opponent slid backwards yet again his jaw even getting dislocated as he lost a tooth from the exchange. Matt didn’t rejoice though as the fist that he hit the man on the face was hurting like hell.

‘Go down you fuck!’

He screamed internally while his enemy moved back into place, he could dodge the fist, he could putt out his sword or use some tactics, yet something was compelling him to power through it. Did he suffer some kind of status effect that was making him so prideful, or was this how he really was deep down inside? He wasn’t sure, but he thought that he would lose dignity that he thought that he didn’t have if he gave up before the other person did.

Soon thirty minutes had passed and the two were just going back and forth, hitting each other. More and more they ended up on the ground, but both of them kept standing up burning passion in their eyes. If Matt didn’t know better, he would think that he turned into some kind of meat-headed protagonist that never gave up. Always having to face their enemies in a fair fight, their will unbroken.

While the two were continuing their punch out, the other cultivators looked at them with mixed feelings. Most of the men kind of understood why the Zhang Patriarch was sticking to this approach, while the girls thought that he was an idiot for getting pulled into the enemies rhythm. Though all of them agreed on one thing, the man was really resilient none of them felt like they could take one of those punches and be able to get up as well as he did.

“Do you think he can win it?”

“I’m not sure, they look equally matched... what monsters...”

“They have been at it for an hour, is their stamina infinite?”

“Let’s hope the boy manages, don’t think any of us can face that monster...”

The people chattered while standing close to the barrier, they had gone around it hitting it in various places wondering if they could help Zhang Dong out. They didn’t find a weak spot that they could slip in though, this barrier would probably hold off a nascent soul master. They could only twiddle their thumbs and wait for the silver-haired man to win this.

‘Ah damn, my face hurts... is my nose broken? Will my teeth grow back if I lose any...’

He staggered backwards falling onto his ass, his opponent huffing and puffing as he was showing signs of fatigue. Well, not like he was better off though, he was bleeding from his nose and mouth only thanks to reaching the great circle in his body refining he was surviving this somehow.

‘Think my body is harder than his, but he has a stronger healing ability...’

He would knock the Sin of Pride further back, breaking some bones in the process as his face was all bloody by this point. The problem was that after they switched turns, the man would start healing up and his broken jaw, chipped teeth all grew back into place. He, on the other hand, didn’t suffer as much damage but it was slowly accumulating.

‘I guess that’s was his plan, force me into a battle of attrition that I can’t win. But did he think that I would last this much...’

The boss monster wasn’t grinning as much now as he was before, the two had been punching each other for over an hour now. Both of them had dishevelled hair and bloodied clothes, but the Sin of Pride was looking slightly worse than Matt was. He also stopped taunting him after each hit, he would shout some cocky phrases here and there but he was dropping the act now, his brows furrowing as Matt moved back into place with his fist ready to slam into that face one more time.

Matt gathered more energy into it, he still had some left in his tank as he was smart enough not to go full throttle from the get-go. This looked like a turning point, or just a scheme of the other man to make Matt show his cards. Though he didn’t think that would be the case, as going by the theme of Pride the Sin of Pride should be too prideful to pull any sneaky tricks on him

The fist shined in a blue hue, lightning energy filling the space around him as Zhang Dong applied his condensation skill along with his avatar form just targeting his fist. Thunder resounded through the area as his wide fist smashed into the enemy’s nose, shattering it on contact. The man’s arms and legs remained stationary while his body was pushed back which made it look quite comedic. The boss monster flew back, making a nice arc as he hit the throne that he was sitting on at the beginning of the stage.

The last punch took quite a bit out of him, his hand spasming and his veins bulging due to the condensation techniques side effects. Luckily the enemy wasn’t moving for some reason, he looked like he was sleeping on that throne with his head slumped forward.

“Umm... I win?”

He raised his fist upwards while being slumped forward and barely standing up on his own two feet. Matt was close to passing out himself, he wasn't sure how many punches to the face he took but he hoped that he didn't get permanent brain damage now. He slowly walked over to the passed out Sin of Pride, not knowing if this was over or not. When he was leaning down, the man suddenly opened up his eyes which made Matt stumble back and almost fall on his butt once more.

"Buahahaha, It's my loss!"

The man smacked his thigh like he was having a jolly good time, though he was looking quite awful as Matt had destroyed quite a bit of his face during the punching contest.

"Congratulations oh Prideful one, you may receive your reward now!"

Suddenly he started turning into small spiritual lights like the other summoned monsters when you defeated them, his face still showing a dumb grin.

"Hope you can entertain me again when we meet anew. Enjoy your reward while you still can, prideful one"

Matt didn't get to ask about what he meant with that as he soon vanished and the barrier surrounding the area vanished. This wasn't over as the throne opened up and a small chest rose up from the sitting spot. It wasn't a large chest, something that you would use to store some jewellery at most. After opening it up he found a strange black cube inside.

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'What is this?'

The system couldn't analyze it and it was extremely hard, even when he gripped it with all his strength the thing wouldn't budge a muscle.

'Maybe it's some kind of key? Guess I should watch out for cube-sized holes.'

He shrugged and placed it in a side pocket of his robe, but just after doing that he collapsed to his knees. He didn't think his injuries were that bad, but the moment he felt the relief of beating the enemy his body started shutting down. He slumped forward, face planting on the throne out cold while his companions rushed in to check upon him.

He suddenly woke up while resting on a large leather couch, books around him as he was back in the library building.

'Ah, guess I'm not dead... but my face still hurts...'

He stood up and found Feng Maling studying some kind of occult looking book.

"Oh hey, how long was I out?"

He asked without thinking much, but the woman ignored him her eyes focusing on the thing in front of her as if it was something required for living.

'Wait... how long was I out...Fuck!'

He knew that this was the last level, it looked different than the previous ones. But this meant that he was out for an unknown amount of time and didn't get to copy any textures down, he might not make it in time. He started quickly running and poking the scriptures, realising that they were mostly in the heaven grade. On this level, there were both cultivation manuals and ones for crafting and pill making. The amount was less than on the lower levels but he didn't know how much time he had left, he had to copy them down as soon as he could.

'Wasn't there supposed to be some kind of reward as well?'

While Zhang Dong was shuffling through the books, his clan members were still stuck in the fortress. They had spent a whole month at this location and it looked a lot different than before.

Firstly, the shape of it wasn't square anymore or at least the outer walls changed. They had been spending their days killing a monster wave each day, the stronger the monsters the more points they earned for clearing them out. The cultivators figured out how the treasure map in the form of the hologram worked and had placed an octagonal wall, that surrounded the old square ones.

On the new wall, there were other weapons there beside the ballista. There were cannons placed lined up on the walls, shooting out blasts of condensed energy. They required specialised ammunition that was carried over by the Qi condensation cultivators. At the spots where the walls connected to each other stood defensive towers, more cannons and ballistas being placed there. Inside of them, there were people, wielding some weapons like rapid firing spirit crossbows that they also could exchange for points.

It looked like they were doing fine on the outside having constructed a larger fortress that was there before, but the atmosphere in the control room was a bit different.

"We used up all of the resources on repairing, the next wave will be starting in an hour, it's going to be worse than the previous one..."

One person proclaimed while glancing at the hologram of the fortress, the number of points being in the single digits, the amount not enough to buy even the simplest self firing weapon.

Zhang Zhi, Huo Tao, and Feng Daiyu looked tired, they had been actively participating in defending the fort, it wasn't strange for the walls to crumble and they having to bunker back behind the ones deeper inside.

"The number of core formation beasts is increasing, there was one more this time around too, it almost got through the inner walls."

"That formation that your Zhang Clan possesses is really astonishing, Brother Zhi."

Huo Tao declared while rubbing his beard, the Huo clan had long thrown out their misgivings about the other cultivators here. After having fought for a month everyone realised that they had to work together, otherwise they would all surely die. There was some tension in the beginning, even some deaths due to some misgivings, people fighting each other out of stress. Luckily the people somehow managed to get past that first hump, mostly due to the Zhang Clan listening to their Patriarch order and not retaliating as much and instead trying to work it out together.

Teamwork had a limit though, the ferocious beasts were getting stronger and stronger even though they could fortify this base of theirs, they were slowly faltering. Something was coming, past the 90th wave, the time of rest had decreased each time. This would be the 100th one, and they were expecting something big.

“Final wave will commence in 5...4...3...2...1...”

After the robotic voice resounded everyone gulped hard, the people that weren't injured were manning the walls and towers looking out into the distance. The terrain was already destroyed, the ground bulldozed by all the previous monster waves. Soon people heard thumping noises coming from the distance soon enough four giant silhouettes could be distinguished each monster larger than the other as they came from all sides.

From the East came an azure dragon it was floating slightly above ground as it moved forward. From the south flew a vermilion bird, spewing fire as it charged forward. From the west, they saw a white tiger charging right at them while up north was the largest beast a black tortoise lumbering towards them, the immense shell it had didn't look like it could be pierced by anything.

Chapter 100

The 9th Platoon was standing in one of the towers, on their side was the large white tiger. It wasn't alone though as there were many smaller feline type beasts moving in front of it. The giant monster strolled while yawning like it was bored that it had to even leave its nesting place to take care of the bug-like cultivators.

“Great ancestors, in what realm is that beast?”

Zhang Jie looked at the far away monster with her looking glass, the spiritual energy coming from the large tiger beast was immense. This kind of aura belonged to someone at the top of core formation, but she wasn't sure if it was in the late stage or in the great circle.

“This doesn't look good... everyone get ready, fire when they are in range!”

The junior members were ready, they had been doing this for a month already some of them were injured from the previous battle. Zhang Peng had a really large canon and was holding it against his shoulder, making it look like he was carrying a rocket launcher. Zhang Hong was to the side, he looked a lot slimmer now than previously, mostly his upper body that turned all that fat into muscle. Still, his battle robe was protruding at the belly part.

Zhang Teng and Bao were to the side, gathering ammunition in the corner making sure that they had enough before they had to return to get some more for their brothers and sisters. Zhang Yuu and Mii weren't here with them as they went to the barracks to help out with the injured, their healing arts having progressed quite a bit during this hard month of battling.

Zhang Ai and Xue were holding crossbows that had a part that you could load bolts into, they were just making sure that everything was in place before placing the weapons against the small windows in the tower they were in and taking aim. Zhang Tai and Liu were sitting in something that looked like a cockpit, they had something that helped them aim the cannon that they were operating as these cost a lot fewer points than the ones that were automatic.

Soon you could hear cannon fire, the monsters exploding into gory bits as they were hit by the metallic shells. The whole place looked like a more futuristic fortress, with spotlights shining and heavy artillery getting fired from it by the cultivators inside. You could see gyaru girls running around with boxes in their hands, quickly restocking the used up self-working ballistas.

Explosions filled the entire place, the monster wave didn't stop as for every beast that exploded during the charge two more came from behind it and like a tsunami they got closer and closer finally arriving close to the walls. But before the creatures could start climbing and devouring the people inside an energy barrier appeared to block their path. The monsters scratched it with their claws, bit into it and just charged at it in a fit of rage, the energy bubble wouldn't be able to stop them forever.

The biggest problem were the flying enemies, the largest of them looked like a phoenix made from fire. It was circling above the large fortress casting a shadow over it, while the people inside tried shooting it down with their spiritual cannons, to no avail as it was out of range. They had to leave it alone for now as the smaller flying beasts started slamming into the transparent energy field. They turned into hedgehogs due to the many crossbow bolts that the defending cultivators fired into them.

It looked like they were in a standstill for now, but that was only due to the boss monsters not really moving in. The monsters stopped and watched as their minions attacked the castle in an angry rush, the only huge beast that was constantly moving was the turtle that was almost as big as the whole fortress that the cultivators were defending.

Time ticked down and minutes turned into hours, the monsters still kept coming. The people inside recognized a lot of those beasts from the previous waves but due to the increased firepower and defensive structures, they went down a lot faster than before. Soon enough the monsters from the previous wave made their appearance, prompting the elder members from the clan to head out into battle.

The battle looked bleak as the first defensive barrier got breached and the cultivators had to flee into the inner fortress. The automatic weapons were quickly destroyed or they run out of ammunition as the beast burst forward. It looked like it would be a repeat of what happened on the previous wave, the Zhang Clan members were already in their serpent formation firing off their breathing attack to bring down one of the core formation beasts that made its way past the barricade.

Everyone was desperately fighting for their lives, but the most powerful monsters were still just sitting outside the first wall and waiting. Only after the beasts moved into the inner sanctum and were defeated once more the ones outside moved. The tiger roared out loudly prompting the remaining feline beasts to part ways for it, the same happened on all sides.

"Damn, there is no place to run and those beasts are still coming..."

Zhang Zhi propped himself upwards, the last attack that he performed along with his clan members having drained his reserves. The last wave was bad enough, but even though they defeated the monsters the path was open. All the walls were breached, just a couple of cannons remained with some leftover cultivators still reloading and firing them off at the enemies.

"Was it impossible to win from the start?... I have failed you, Patriarch"

Huo Tao lamented while blood was running down his face, the man having a hard time keeping conscious after taking a serious blow from an angry-looking beast.

Feng Daiyu was to the side just sighing, they put up a noble fight but this looked like it was it for them. The monsters outside just needed to move in, to dish out the killing blow. Their strength was immense and even if they had the power of the fortress behind them, she thought that they had a slim chance of coming out on top.

A bit outside the inner sanctum in one of the partially destroyed towers the 9th platoon was still fighting. Monsters started flooding inside and they were battling them with the help of their weapons.

Zhang Xue and Liu combined their lightning attacks to send one of the leopard looking beast tumbling back, letting Zhang Peng smash his fist into its spine taking it out in the process. They all looked injured, sweat running down their foreheads and dripping to the floor along with their blood.

Zhang Jie was to the side, holding onto her belly a monster had pierced it with its sharp claws before she could take it out. She was getting nursed by one of the girls, Xue and Liu quickly ran up to her worry in their eyes.

“Mother!”

“Leave me... I’ll hold them off, you must reach the inner fortress with the rest of the clan members.”

They got separated from their clan members when the beasts burst through the walls, so they were sitting ducks for the incoming monster cats. The thumping of the largest one getting louder and louder as it approached them at an increased pace.

“No we can’t, we will survive this together.”

Zhang Xue replied with tears in her eyes, her mother glancing up at her children that she held dear to her heart. They were her pride and joy and she only came here with them to keep watch, but this would be the end for her. She would stay behind in the hopes of a miracle, even if she could just buy them a second of more time it would be enough.

“Silence, this is an order. Get back to the inner sanctuary!”

She glanced at the other platoon members with a stern face, which prompted them to grasp the crying girl pulling her back from her mother. Zhang Jie nodded as the others started evacuating, her eyes meeting with her Son’s on the way as he hesitated as well.

“Take care of your sister.”

The youth didn’t reply and just made a small bow and then turned around leaving, a small tear running down his cheek as he lamented. The woman stood up going further up onto the tower, her wound was just patched up but it was enough for her to last a few moments. She saw beast charging her way, their teeth sharp and their claws long. She was holding on to a chipped sword and plunged it into the beast’s eye as it tried pouncing at her. The weapon snapped in half as she tumbled to the side, her battle wound opening up.

The monster slumped after its brain got pierced by the weapon, turning into bubbles of energy soon after. The woman leaned about a cracked battlement looking back seeing that her children were running

back they would probably make it to the other clan members. She smiled but was startled as she heard a startling deep growl.

She turned to see a large feline eye just staring at her, the white tiger had made its way to the tower she was in. The beast was immense and wouldn't have trouble in gulping her down in one quick bite. The woman coughed up some blood and looked up into the sky, eyes soon closing and a smile appearing on her face.

"I'll be joining you soon dear, Jie'er did her best..."

She was tired, tired from all the fighting, tired from all the bloodshed. The moment she accepted her impending death her legs gave out under her and she slumped on the ground. The beast just gave out a snort that made the woman slide backward and hit the wall, more blood coming out of her mouth in the process.

The beast looked at the small bug in front of it, why wasn't the little human trembling like it was supposed to? The proud tiger didn't understand while the bug was smiling and just waiting there. But it wouldn't refuse free food, the woman was of a higher cultivation level and looked quite yummy. Its giant maw opened up wide, the teeth being almost as large as the human that they were going towards. The beast's warm breath hit Zhang Jie's skin and some saliva dripped on her body, soon the mouth would close devouring her whole.

"KRRACCKKK!"

The monster felt something slam into its head shattering its giant teeth in the process. Its immense body flew backward slamming into the destroyed wall and bouncing further and further. It kept rolling and bouncing in a comedic fashion soon leaving the premise of the outer fortress walls that it came through, its mind dazed as the hit rattled its brain, stunning it momentarily.

Zhang Jie felt the wind hit her face, pushing her further back into the wall she was leaning but nothing besides that. The pain didn't come and she didn't feel the monster's breath upon her anymore, which prompted her to open up her eyes. What she saw was a giant blue fist in the spot that the monster tiger's face was previously in, lightning energy crackling from it.

"P-Patriarch?"

She said in a daze while staring at the avatar form that she knew that her clan Patriarch used before. It was a bit bigger than the one he used when he saved the clan from the impending doom before, but it was clearly him.

"Sorry for being late, leave him to me. Take this and go back to the rest of the clan."

A recovery pill dropped on her head, right between her eyes which she quickly gobbled up a relaxing feeling washing over her body and her cracked bones and wounds quickly recovering. She looked as the lightning giant moved towards the equally large white tiger. With each step the giant took lightning energy shoot out, incinerating the lesser monster in its path.

"It's the Patriarch!"

Zhang Dong's appearance and overbearing aura was hard to miss, the Zhang Clan members cheered out loud as they saw their leader sock the beast tiger in the face sending it flying backward. Matt was the first one to arrive but soon enough the tired foundation establishment and qi condensation cultivators could see other core formation experts appearing, each one of them attacking the four beasts that were in similar stages as them.

Feng Liena and Feng Maling headed towards the flying monster, everyone had recovered the usage of their storage rings so they could finally use their flying swords once more. Huo Qiang and his bodyguard went towards the dragon while the remaining two decided to stall the slow-moving turtle monster, they didn't think they would be able to crack its shell but they could buy some time till Zhang Dong and the rest took care of the other beasts.

"It's the young master!"

"The Matriarch and the elder are still alive!"

"We are saved!"

Everyone cheered out loud as they saw their seniors arriving in the nick of time. Some of them were still missing but this was a massive confidence boost to all of the cultivators.

While Matt was running towards the tiger Zhang Jie quickly returned to her own clan members, Xue clinging to her arm and crying her eyes out once more.

"Xue'er you need to stop being such a crybaby, Mother is fine thanks to the Patriarch."

She replied while looking into the distance, the white tiger was in a chokehold thrashing around and trying to bite at the large lightning construct that was holding onto it tightly.

"Master is finally back!"

Zhang Liu had stars in his eyes and a grin plastered on his face, the faith that he had in Zhang Dong was slowly going into overdrive. The rest of the Zhang Clan members weren't far behind as they looked at the kaiju battle happening in the background, the white tiger suffering a slam that made the whole secret ground tremble.

"Everyone gather up, assume the formation we are going to support the Seniors!"

Zhang Zhi stumbled forward, still fatigued from the previous battle but reinvigorated by his leader's appearance. Everyone shouted out in unison as they assumed their position, soon the water serpent was formed. Zhi realized by the battle that the Patriarch didn't need any more help, so instead, they headed for the firebird, their water elemental serpent being just the thing to counter its fire attacks.

There were still smaller beasts around, so the cultivators barricaded themselves in the innermost wall of the fortress. Using the remaining ranged weapons as well as engaging the monster in hand to hand combat. The monsters were finally getting pushed back, the sounds of battle filled the surroundings.

Matt rammed his fist into the tiger, sending his sharp chompers flying into the air. He could tell what the theme of these beasts was from one look and from which directions they were coming from.

'The four guardian beasts huh, not a bad choice I guess...'

He thought to himself nonchalantly while delivering another full power punch to the beast's side, sending it tumbling to the side. The beast didn't look like it would be putting up much of a fight against this overpowered Patriarch but he couldn't play with it for too long as the others weren't as strong as him.

He started getting smaller and smaller, the tiger was on the ground shaking its head while recovering, he had enough time to deliver a finisher. He pulled out his sword, the weapon radiating with spiritual energy as it expanded into the heavens. He held his longsword with both hands, eyes closed and right at the time when he opened them he brought the sword downwards in a slash.

"Sever the Heaven!"

He shouted out, while the energy beam traveled downward. The monster could only look on in shock as the sword strike descended from the sky before it could evade to the side it was bisected the ground forming a chasm the moment the sword energy hit it. Lots of dirt and dust got flung into the air as the first monster got slain.

Guardian White Tiger Slain (Core Formation Great Circle) 90000 points earned

Matt rubbed his nose a bit, blushing slightly due to shouting out the attack name before performing it.

'Hope nobody heard that... embarrassing.'

The first beast fell, its two sides splitting and falling opposite each other. The peculiar thing was that the monster didn't turn into energy bubbles like the rest of them, but Matt was sure that it was dead. It was cleanly sliced in two parts, there should be no way of it to recovering its previous form. Also, there was the system prompt, and he even earned a good amount of points.

'I should go help the others...'

He thought while hearing a rumbling shout, he looked into the distance and saw Huo Qiang standing in a karate like stance. His bodyguard was keeping the monster dragon busy, it looked like it had already suffered some damage but so did the two other cultivators. The red-haired brother was gathering all of his spiritual energy into his fist strike, clearly taking his time while his clan member distracted the beast.

"This new technique... I only managed to cultivate it to a minor achievement but it should be enough...Take this beast!"

"Flame Emperor's Pure Yang Destruction Fist."

Matt stumbled forward after hearing the long name of the attack that Huo Qiang threw at the monster. The moment the man punched out you could see some kind of flame giant show himself behind him, it looked like a transparent hologram and he was taking the same stance and had the same facial expression as the cultivator in front.

The mutton chop elder fled to the side as he almost got hit by his young master's attack, he tumbled to the side. The flame fist cleanly landed on the dragon's head promptly turning it to mincemeat and filling the whole area with fire energy. There was a huge explosion that made everyone look in the direction.

"Heh... not bad."

Matt smiled as he saw Huo Qiang passing out after throwing that fist attack at the monster. His new friends were a lot stronger than expected, the two women battled the giant bird slicing its wings with their wind attacks, the water serpent spewing beams out of its maw interrupting the firebird when it tried to counter-attack.

The turtle, on the other hand, was getting its face slapped around by a big Buddha statue. Bankei had gathered his remaining sect buddies and went into a formation of their own. The statue looked golden and had six arms, it was hovering above ground while in a sitting position delivering strikes to the monster's head that tried snapping at it.

Matt decided to go for the Turtle now as it looked a lot sturdier than the bird that was getting its feathers plucked by his clan members and the Feng Clan ladies.

It didn't take long for the cultivators to successfully eradicate every remaining monster in the area. The hardest one to kill was indeed the turtle as even though its attacks were weak, it was really hard to get through that shell. After the phoenix look-alike fell, everyone gathered up and started blasting the thing from all sides, soon enough the shell broke and the beast fell.

"We did it!"

"Wooo... I'm alive!!!"

"It's over right? This is it? I want to go home..."

People shouted out, cheering loudly their wounds didn't hurt as much now when they had victory on their minds. Everyone was tired, most of the fortress was in shambles wall chunks were everywhere. Just as Matt was ready to shout out to his clan members the robotic voice resounded around the area once more.

"Congratulations on completing the 100th wave... The bonus stage will start now."

"Bonus stage?"

Matt blinked wondering what this was about, but then he felt that something was happening to the giant monster bodies. They started glowing and condensing into small balls. The four spheres then shot out into the air gathering in one spot and fusing with each other. There was a giant shockwave that kicked up storm like winds and the cultivators felt a massive surge in spiritual energy in that area.

"No... this is?"

"I-it can't be..."

The energy was far greater than what a core formation cultivator could have, so everyone gulped as the area where the orbs fused together started showing an outline. Soon enough a large shout resounded through the destroyed testing grounds.

"Buahahah, I told you that we would meet again, didn't I, oh prideful one?"

The man was the previously fought Sin of Pride, but he looked a bit different. His body, as well as his face, was all red, his hands looked more like claws and his horns that were previously meager were quite large now. He looked like a textbook demon, sharp teeth white as pearls and an armor of red covering

his whole body he even had large bat-like wings growing out of his back while hovering up in the air. But that wasn't the problem though.

"N-nascent soul? How could this be..."

Demon Lord [nascent soul early stage]

"I must thank you for setting me free, I don't get many opportunities to stretch my wings~"

The demon smirked while filling the area with its overbearing demonic aura.

"Set you free?"

Matt asked while looking up at the monster, he was feeling the brunt of that force that was making even him tremble.

"Oh, did you forget about the little game that we had? I hope the rewards were worth it~"

Matt groaned, the reason that the bonus stage started was probably that he blundered and accepted the pride monsters offer. How could he know that even when winning it, it would bring doom upon him and the clan later on?

"Well, not like I made the rules, hope you can entertain me for a bit~"

The demon shrugged while grinning and charging out, he was so fast that he vanished from Matt's field of vision and appeared behind him in a fraction of a second. Demonic wings kicking up massive winds that sent everyone close in the area backward, everyone was sent flying in various directions while the demonic being looked at Zhang Dong. The attack was clearly aimed at the cultivators beside Matt as he was mostly unaffected but everyone else was tossed aside.

Matt took on a fighting stance, the demon in front was in the nascent soul realm, could he even damage him? The grinning demon crossed his muscular arms over one another and just waited there, his head turned to the side as if he was beckoning him to strike his cheek just like when they had the punching contest.

Matt clenched his fist if the monster was willing to let him deliver a strike he would put everything into it. He gathered all of his spiritual energy into his right arm activating all skills that would let him enhance this hook. His forearm bulged out, veins protruding from it. His whole arm started crackling with lightning energy, the Qi getting pushed forward as the glow on his fist got brighter. He jumped forward ready to strike, the monster unmoving as if it didn't care about the puny attack that this human was preparing.

The ground trembled under Zhang Dong's might, he charged forward each step leaving a large hole behind, the other cultivators only seeing a white blur flying towards the demonic being.

'BOOOOMMM!'

The whole place shook as the strike connected, hurricane winds blasting everything to the side, people looking on in awe. Nothing should be able to survive a hit like that, this strike was extremely close to the nascent soul level even a master like that shouldn't come out unscathed, or so they thought.

"Hmm... is that all?"

A demonic voice could be heard which made everyone shiver, after the dust cloud subsided everyone could see what actually happened. Zhang Dong was kneeling down on the ground, holding his right hand with his left. The right fist in question looked mangled up, the skin was torn and some fingers were broken.

"Argh..."

Matt screamed out while grasping his hand, did he punch an iron wall or something. His hand was broken and bleeding, he looked up at the demonic being the man in question looking quite smug. He didn't have time to recover as a swift kick sent him flying back, the demon finally attacking.

"Ehh, I had high hopes for you, but you are this weak?"

Matt bounced a couple of times before managing to regain his balance, his good hand digging into the hard bedrock as he slid backward and finally came to a stop. He got kicked in the chest and felt that his ribs broke in a couple of places, he spat blood onto the ground and looked in horror in the direction of the monster that was flying towards him.

He grasped his sword, pushing all the energy that he could muster into it. When the demon got into his domain he released a barrage of sword strikes applying the same technique he used to slice up the Cthulhu like creature. The demon just walked forward, looking relaxed as the sword energy collided with his body. Matt expected to see blood but instead of slicing the demon apart, his sword broke into tiny fragments after it got smacked by the red monster's large hand.

"Pathetic."

Another kick landed to his side, he tried blocking it with his good arm but it got folded in half along with his body as he got blasted to the side. He screamed out in pain, blood spurting out of his side as he tumbled along.

'Fuck, it hurts.'

He couldn't move his other arm at all, it was just dangling like a wet noodle while he gathered himself up. The monster was just toying with him now, he had no way of retaliating. He was flung around the area like a punching bag, his legs soon broken while the demon grinned from seeing the previously prideful cultivator finally having a look of despair.

"That's it! Those eyes, that's how you are supposed to look! Despair more and grovel!"

He held Matt up with one hand, delivering some backhand and forehand slaps to his face before tossing him to the side and stomping on his legs some more. The man below just a broken mess now, tears, snot, and blood coming out of his orifices while he squirmed.

"Quickly, support the Patriarch!"

Some cultivators charged out from the side, but with a small gesture from the monster's wings, they tumbled backward like paper planes in hurricane winds. Their low cultivation levels not being able to resist the overpowered monster in the slightest.

"Hah, little worms..."

"L-leave them alone!"

Matt shouted while coughing, he pushed his broken stump of an arm into the ground as he was trying to stand up but the only thing that greeted him was the monsters swift kick that sent him flying once more, his chest denting inside as most of his ribs got broken. He ended up somewhere on his back, he had no strength to move at all, his vision was blurry and the pain was getting unbearable.

"You care about those insects so much? Bahaha, then watch them die!"

The demon grinned even more and strode towards the other cultivators, leaving Matt down on the ground so that he could watch as he killed those pesky humans.

"Haven't had so much fun in thousands of years, I must thank you, my friend. I'll be sure to kill them slowly~"

The monster laughed out loud while eyeing some of the cultivators that were further away. Matt's vision was fading as he was close to passing out, he had no way of saving anyone his body was beaten and battered.

'Is this it?... Am I going to die?... why was I even brought to this place?... I don't want to die... I still haven't done anything...'

His mind was filled with thoughts of failure, he lamented his incompetence if he wasn't so stupid and didn't take the monster's offer. Why did he always fail in everything, his life started flashing through his mind, a life of loneliness and mediocrity. Even with this system, he was unable to change his destiny. He started laughing, more blood coming out of his mouth as he chuckled at his inability.

"I'm sorry everyone..."

He wanted to apologize to the people that put their faith in him, he truly felt like he let everyone down. Everyone would die and he felt that he was to blame, maybe if he was a little smarter, listened to the wise words of the senior members or if he tried a bit harder, it wouldn't have ended up like this.

But suddenly in this moment of weakness, he noticed something to the side. It was the cube that he received after the seventh trial, it must have bounced to the side after he got smacked by one of the demon's attacks. It was slightly cracked, its outer shell filled with spiderweb-like fissures.

'W...what...'

The cube was giving off some kind of strange aura from all those small cracks, it was faint but it was still there. Like a man grasping for glass while falling from a building, he inched his broken body forward. He got closer and closer, not really sure why he was even bothering but something was pushing him forward, telling him not to give up.

Spirit energy source detected, do you want to absorb it?

He moved his arm upwards, his bones were broken in several places and he felt excruciating pain, but he needed to tap that yes prompt.

Starting absorption process please standby... error ... an abnormality has been detected ... system overloading...

He saw his status window that was a bit blurry, the points were shooting up by an unexpected amount.

'893291....1263145... 4678231...8523135...'

He didn't just twiddle his thumbs though after the absorption process started he felt that his body started getting healed. He didn't know why it was happening but he was going to make it count, he quickly brought up his up cultivation window spending the required points on the golden lightning option.

His body started crackling as lightning energy got summoned, this wasn't all though he started dumping all the remaining points into his cultivation base just as fast as those points increased they diminished. He was nothing but a glowing light in the distance, the energies filled the area as this body began changing.

In the distance the Demon was holding onto a certain young man, this young man had peculiar salt and pepper hairstyle. The demon was interested a bit as he and a younger girl had charged at him with murder in their eyes.

"Ah, you are his disciples... wonder what face he will make if I kill you in front of him..."

The monster grinned but then felt something strange, he quickly tossed the brat to the side not caring if he was dead or alive and took flight.

"What is this..."

He saw an energy sphere floating in the air, golden lightning was shooting out and randomly destroying the surrounding areas. The demon got closer but then quickly retreated the moment he felt something being off.

"Holy element!?"

He wasn't stupid, he knew that it had to be the puny man that he had trashed a moment ago. Was he breaking through? If so he had to be stopped. The demon's eyes started glowing purple as he took in a deep breath, his chest expanding. He opened up his mouth, a beam of purple light shooting out and aimed at the cultivator inside the energy sphere.

At least that was the plan, but just before firing off his ranged attack he felt various spiritual energy attacks coming his way. They were coming from the various half dead cultivators from the area, trying to use the moment that the demon wasn't alert as a last-ditch effort attack.

"YOU DARE!?"

The demon shouted in anger as his beam whizzed past Zhang Dong by a hair, the cultivators in the area slumping down tired. He was about to lash out at them but then turned around, Zhang Dong was hovering up in the air, looking different than before. The demon could feel that disgusting holy aura coming off of him, golden light and lightning bolts were randomly shooting off his body and the golden aura that he was now producing made his white hair seem yellow.

"Nascent soul?... no...not quite?"

Matt had no more points to spend, he poured them all into his cultivation and body rising both of them to 100%. But this left him with absolutely no more to spend so he couldn't further upgrade his cultivation into the nascent soul realm.

'This will have to do... not it will do!'

The demon looked relieved that even though the man in front of him got stronger, he still was only at half step into the nascent soul. Matt was done playing though, he would go 100% from the get-go, not leaving the monster any chance as he had a way to temporarily bridge that gap.

He clenched his fists shouting out while quickly activating his avatar technique as well as his condensation art, his body turning slightly larger and making him look like a man made from pure golden energy. The demon looked bewildered at the sudden increase of power and before he could react he felt a strong smack to his face, the hit-making him burrow into the ground a kilometer from the spot that he was previously in.

He quickly burst out from the ground, rage on his face as he scanned the area for his opponent. He was greeted by a swift kick to his face as he was turning around, tumbling backward his nose bent in an awkward position.

"YOU WORM!"

He shouted while glaring at the golden human that was charging towards him once more, he punched out trying to catch the enemy unprepared but got caught in a clean counter punch instead which sent him back into some rubble. The creature found his opponent to be faster than him, he started getting forced into a defensive stance as Zhang Dong's kicks and punches rained down on him. The addition of the holy element in the attacks was weakening the monster even further.

Black blood rained down on the ground, sizzling and burning everything in its path as the monster coughed up copious amounts of it, just like Zhang Dong did when he got previously thrashed. Matt was in a hurry, he knew that he had precious moments before he would suffer the backlash of the skill he was using, he could already feel his veins bulging and his internal organs ready to burst from the stress.

He bit down on his lower lip, shouting out loudly as he delivered a massive hit to the monster managing to blast its shoulder to bits. The demon flew backward grasping his side, his arm along with the shoulder got blasted to the side and the holy energy was preventing him from regenerating.

"YOU DAMN INSECT!"

The monster's eyes glowed purple once more, he was preparing to fire off another of those ranged attack. He was taking his time in gathering the spiritual energy into his lungs but Matt wasn't being idle either. He grasped his right wrist with his left hand, his index finger on his right hand pointing upwards as he gathered copious amounts of energy into it. This would be it, this would be the last attack that he was going to put all of his soul into.

Everyone looked on in shock as they saw the two face each other, they knew that something big was coming. Everyone scattered, hiding behind walls or using all of their defensive trinkets hoping for the

best. Soon Zhang Dong pointed his finger at the monster and he in response breathed out, a giant wide beam of purple light was heading at the golden cultivator.

In response a beam attack was released from Zhang Dong's finger it was the finger art that he leaned back in one of the levels of that library. This was the strongest attack he could muster up in this situation. His once muscular body started getting thinner and thinner as the beam slammed into the wider one and started pushing against it.

"DIE DIE DIE DIE DIE DIE DIE DIE, YOU DAMN WORM"

The monster shouted as he as well was withering from using up all of his energy in this attack. Matt was sweating profusely but he couldn't give in, he would kill this monster even if he had to die. He mustered up everything he had, all of his life force was pushed to bring all of those skills that he was using to a new height. His finger beam expanded in girth as it penetrated through the purple light and slammed into the monster's chest penetrating right through him in one fell swoop.

"I—IMPOSSIBLE.... I... I AM... IMMORTAL..."

The beam burrowed through him, the holy energies invading the monster's body and incinerating him from the inside turning him into dust soon after the attack passed. The monster was slain and the beam hit something in the distance. The generated explosion looked like a small atomic one as it produced a giant shockwave.

"I... I... I d-d...did it..."

Matt managed to mutter some words before the backlash came, all of his blood vessels burst open making him look like a ripe tomato. He couldn't move a muscle and started to fall down from the sky like a deflated balloon. He crashed into the hard rubble down below his vision getting blurry. He could hear people running towards him, shouting some words but he wasn't sure what as his hearing was giving out.

The Zhang clan members that ran up were looking at their fallen Patriarch, he looked kind of peaceful a small smile on his face. Which was a stark contrast to the state of his body was in, he looked like a starved beggar. His disciples gathered around him, trying to hold his hand that was losing its warmth.

They gathered around him, forming the strongest healing formation they could muster up anyone that was adept at healing was trying to help. But to no avail, the man's life was fading and they could not do anything about it.

'Hah...'

'I hope everyone is safe...'

'I'm so tired... I'm just going to sleep for a bit...yeah... sleep...'

Soon he couldn't feel any pain, all of his senses shut down leaving him only with his thoughts which were slowly fading away. He was a bit sad that he couldn't do more, but this was fine those guys should be safe now he was sure that the people from the other clans would help them out in the future, he could rest easy.

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'Critical error detected, host body in critical condition trying to restore bodily functions....'

'Host beyond saving, switching to transfer protocol, transferring remaining resources to origin point'

'Error...error...program is getting overwritten resource transfer aborted...'

'Anomaly in system detected... error...'

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'...overwriting original programming...'

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'Transferring all remaining resources to life saving protocols... prioritizing host survival...'

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'Insufficient resources... removing 'Devouring seed protocol' from the system...'

'...Altering system... please wait... removing redundant subsystems...'Cash shop protocol' removed....'

'System rebooting'

'Activating life saving protocol...'

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.....thump...

....thump....thump

....thump....thump....thump....thump

...' Heart rate restored... host stabilizing...'

The Zhang Clan members were kneeling around their Patriarch, crying their eyes out while something strange happened. They were sure the man had died a couple of minutes ago, his heart had stopped and they couldn't feel any spiritual energy from his dried up core. But suddenly they felt something, the tinies spark igniting deep within his depleted core, he was coming back to them.